



# His Pretty Omega (Sweet Alps Mates #7)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Fate always finds a way...

Seth Brown

Ringling in the new year with a hot alpha hook up in a nice hotel was the best way to start my year. Getting an urgent call from my bestie in the morning had me leaving the alpha with a quick note, and little else. No name. No number. No regrets or expectations. Just a niggling in my brain that I had forgotten something important.

Six weeks later I'm holding a positive pregnancy test and questioning all my life choices. I'd never wanted a baby, or an alpha, but suddenly I found myself questioning things. Can I do this alone? Do I want to?

Alex Ortega

I never expected to meet my fated mate or spend a steamy night with the gorgeous omega while ringing in the new year, but there were worse ways to start the year. Like waking up alone, with no idea how to find my fated mate. I didnt even know his name!

Until he's storming into my office, telling me he is expecting my child, and that he doesn't need anything from me. Fate brought us back together and I don't have any plans of letting my omega get away a second time. Now I just need to convince him that we were meant to be together.

His Pretty Omega was previously released as part of the Knotting Hearts Charity Anthology. It has been expanded with more than 30k of additional content.

**Total Pages (Source):** 33

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

## Chapter One

Alex

This wasn't how I planned to ring in the new year.

When I had booked the New Year's Eve package special the hotel had been running in the spring, I had hoped to spend tonight with my omega—now my ex-omega. It was the whole reason I was leaning against the hotel bar in Hollow Ridge, several hours from home, on December thirty-first.

But my ex lived here, and when we had seen the advertisement at the salsa club one night, he had begged me to book it with puppy dog eyes.

Whispering in my ear about how romantic it would be to ring in the new year together.

I would be the first to admit I was a sucker for an omega batting their eyes at me .

Snorting, I took another sip of the top shelf whiskey.

I had paid for the premium package at the overpriced hotel, which included a king-size suite, buffet dinner, dancing, and best of all a top-shelf drink package.

Which was coming in extra handy tonight, since I was already on my fourth drink, and just a hair past pleasantly buzzed.

The suite was currently empty, the king-size bed mocking me when I tossed my overnight bag next to it.

My omega was long gone, having decided our long-distance relationship was just too long for him.

Even though I had made the hours-long, one-way trip to see him practically every weekend.

Taking him out to fancy restaurants, dancing, and tons of pampering.

But, unbeknownst to me, River had found an alpha to fill up the other five days of his week. I'd found that out when I had decided to show up to surprise him on a Thursday afternoon, taking a couple of days off from my private law practice in Sweet Alps, where I lived.

It had definitely been a surprise for all of us, including River's other alpha, who had been under the assumption River worked every weekend when he had been with me.

When I had made it clear I wasn't interested in sharing, ignoring the temper tantrum River had thrown, I'd left him to his new alpha.

That was six months ago, and to be honest, I had forgotten all about the hotel booking.

Until I received a reminder email a few weeks ago, with all the details for the package I had pre-paid for.

It was too late to cancel and get a refund, and since I had already shelled out more than a few hundred bucks, I decided to have a why not moment and had chosen to enjoy the night, even if I ended up spending it alone.

If nothing else, my booze was paid for, the buffet was excellent, and I had a cushy room to crash in after midnight.

Though, judging by the amount of omegas filling the dance floor, I was hoping I wouldn't be sleeping in that big bed alone.

The large room was nearly wall-to-wall with gorgeous omegas, dancing and vying for the attention of the single alphas in the room.

Not every omega was there alone, there were plenty of couples enjoying the night.

Even so, I was enjoying watching the single ones on the dance floor.

Dancing was a passion of mine, though I preferred salsa dancing. From the music the D.J. had been playing this evening I doubted I would get a chance to show my salsa moves off, but I still might be able to impress one or two of the omegas tonight.

My eyes kept straying back to one particular omega that had caught my eye. He was absolutely stunning.

From this distance, and in the softly colored lights the D.J.

had turned on to illuminate the dancers, I couldn't make out what color his eyes were.

But his hair was dark, and artfully styled around his face, accentuating his high cheekbones.

He was wearing an almost indecently short black leather miniskirt, paired with a lilac mesh long sleeved top.

Knee high black boots completed his ensemble, with a chunky heel that added at least

two inches to his average omega height of about five foot six.

Even with the heels I would still tower over him.

There was something about him that kept drawing my eyes back to him, as his lithe body shimmied to the beat of the music.

The way he moved, the graceful way he undulated his body, the sheer beauty of his delicate features, had my entire body at attention.

My cock gave a throb inside my black slacks, just as interested as the rest of me was.

The omega didn't seem to be with an alpha, as he had come in alone.

Yeah, I'd noticed him as soon as he had walked into the fancy ballroom.

He had immediately sought out a few other omegas who seemed on their own also.

The group of them filled their plates at the buffet, bought drinks at the bar—none of them were wearing black wristbands to indicate they had paid for the drink package—and then hit the dance floor as soon as the music had started playing.

Goddess, I had been creeping on him for hours now.

There are laws against that, Alex.

My wolf, restless beneath my skin, huffed at my internalized thought. Not if you don't act on them. We're just watching. Nothing wrong with that.

Still creepy .

The omega turned my way, shaking his luscious ass, arms swaying over his head. Catching my eyes, his lips spread into a mischievous grin, that even from across the dance floor I could see.

My heart gave a leap when he started sashaying my way, his walk slow and deliberate, with just the perfect amount of sway to his thin hips. My brown eyes cataloged his features the closer he moved to me, his sparkling eyes never leaving mine.

His eyes were a stunning light blue I saw, rimmed in black that made them pop and long, long lashes.

Glossy, pouty, berry-colored lips were turned up into a hint of a smirk.

High cheekbones that shimmered, and purple, glittery eyeshadow that somehow softened his kohl rimmed eyes, and a straight pert nose completed the package.

There was a mischievous glint in those gorgeous eyes of his, a mysterious slant to his upturned mouth and chin. He made a beeline straight towards where I lounged casually against one corner of the bar, out of the way from most of the traffic.

His eyes never left mine, until he stood in front of me, and I looked down at him, my lips upturned in a small smile.

Without a word, he deftly removed my drink from my hands, and I watched as he brought my glass up to his shiny lips.

He drank the remainder of my whiskey down, and I tried not to show my surprise as he held the expensive alcohol in his mouth for two seconds, before letting it slide down his throat.

“Just help yourself.” I was impressed that there hadn’t been any coughing or sputtering when the whiskey hit his taste buds.

He didn’t look one bit sorry that he had stolen my drink right out of my hands. Or that he had taken a drink from a complete stranger.

“Sorry,” the word was said with a flirty giggle that had my wolf and my cock standing straight up to attention. He fluttered one manicured hand in front of his face, the purple glitter polish on his fingers shining in the low lights, “I was thirsty. And the line at the bar is way too long.”

He was many things, but sorry was most certainly not one of them. Not with that smirk he had plastered on his lips, and that naughty gleam in his wide blue eyes.

My nostrils flared, and the tantalizing scent of fresh baked peach pie wafted around me. He smelled luscious, his scent making me think of summertime and happiness.

This pretty brat was trouble with a capital T.

And I was here for it.

One hundred percent in.

At least for tonight.

“You’re trouble.” I watched as he set the empty glass on the bar’s gleaming wooden surface. He grinned broadly at that, looking quite proud of himself and gave a little shrug with one shoulder .

Then he turned on his heel and called over his shoulder, “You have no idea! Byyyyyyy!”

Shaking my head, a huge, goofy smile plastered across my face, I tapped my glass against the bar, catching one of the bartender's eyes for a refill. They were being extra attentive to all of us wristband wearers, I had noticed, and a fresh drink appeared in front of me in seconds.

Turning to watch the dance floor to keep eyes on the little troublemaker, my body stiffened, and my wolf's hackles rose.

The pretty little omega who had helped himself to my drink was now dancing between two burly alphas. One ground against his front, the other his back. There was a sea of arms around all of them, hands roaming and touching willy-nilly, until I could barely tell what appendage belonged to who.

No! My wolf growled fiercely, ours! Anger radiated through my body in a quick flash of burning heat.

Downing my fresh whiskey in a single gulp, I slammed the glass back on the bar with more force than necessary, stomping my way onto the dance floor.

Coming up on the trio, the omega— my omega —noticed me first. His eyes widened briefly with a flicker of concern, before a wicked smile tilted those dark, glossy lips of his and his blue eyes sparkled with heat .

A growl rose in the back of my throat, this one from me and not my wolf, and I yanked him from between the two alphas and pulled him flush against my chest.

“Oh!” he breathily gasped, then blinked up at me, his gorgeous eyes looking slightly dazed. Bright spots of color darkened his cheeks, and his nostrils flared slightly, as my alpha pheromones wrapped around the space between us.

The instant we touched, electricity raced up my arms, my skin tingling. The air fairly



crackled between us.

Mate! My wolf chanted, mate, mate, mate. Ours!

One of the alphas moved towards me, broad shoulders squared back, anger dilating his eyes. Holding up a palm to halt him, I growled roughly, “Mine!”

The man stopped dead in his tracks, giving his companion a questioning look.

“Mine!” I repeated, punctuating the word with another low, throaty growl.

The other alpha gave a quick shake of his head to his companion, and he held up his hands in a he’s-all-yours gesture. “Didn’t know he belonged to anyone the way he was out here shaking his ass for everyone. Sorry. Keep a better leash on him next time, buddy.”

Another growl emanated from my throat, a warning that I didn’t like how they had just spoken about my omega. My sweet-smelling mate said nothing, just stared up at me with his unblinking, wide eyes .

Goddess, he was pretty! One of the prettiest omegas I had ever seen in my life. And his scent! It was intoxicating! Filling my senses and muddling my mind. My cock ached, hard and throbbing, pushing against my slacks to be released.

“Ten!”

“Nine!”

Suddenly the words being shouted around us penetrated the brain fog I had fallen into, and I blinked slowly. Glancing over his dark head, I realized people were holding their glasses up in the air, ready to toast in the new year.

“Five!”

“Four!”

“Three,” the man in my arms whispered.

“Two,” My voice was rough and raspy, as I bent my head in his direction.

“One,” he tilted his face up, his lips parting in a silent invitation. His lashes swept downwards towards his cheekbones, dusted in some kind of shimmering glitter, as his eyes fluttered closed.

“Happy New Year!”

My lips captured his, tasting the berry flavor of the gloss he used on his lips. His arms wound around my neck, pulling me desperately closer to him. His mouth opened without me nudging, and my tongue swept inside, sliding against his eagerly waiting one .

Around us corks popped. Glasses clinked together. People shouted, and confetti fell to the floor in a cascade of bright colors.

Under my feet, my entire world shifted, breaking me apart and then putting me back together again. Better than I had been before.

Perfection.

Peace.

Home.

Forever.

And I knew with a clarity I had never possessed before what this was.

This cheeky man, who stole drinks from strangers without shame, who teased me with his wicked smile, who was going to bring trouble to my life, was my fated mate.

Mine! My wolf sighed, as if I hadn't heard him previously growling the word over and over.

Ours , I agreed.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

### Chapter Two

Seth

When I'd cheekily stolen the very sexy alpha's drink, I'd been nothing more than a brat.

In my defense the man was smoking hot. And I'd been thirsty from all the dancing I had been partaking in.

Besides, the drink prices were jacked up sky high.

I couldn't afford many more of them if I was paying for them.

Though I had only paid for two myself, all the rest had been covered by helpful alphas looking to get laid.

I had noticed the hottie alpha as soon as I had strolled into the hotel ballroom that had been turned into a cross between Christmas and Mardi Gras for the New Year's Eve party.

He was hard to miss, and I hadn't been able to keep my eyes off of him.

He'd been casually leaning against the long bar, tucked into a quiet corner.

His dark gaze had been assessing all the people around him, while he sipped his drink, looking tall and cool, and all kinds of yummy.

As I made small talk with a small group of other single omegas, my eyes kept straying back to him.

Dark brown hair that fell to his shoulders, a close-cropped beard, light brown skin that hinted at a Latino background.

He looked like he was maybe ten years older than my twenty-nine, and he was a nice, tall drink of water.

Maybe six-foot one or two? I was shit at judging height, especially since most alphas towered over my five-foot six frame.

Sometimes when I would peek at him, he would be staring directly at me, and an uncharacteristic shyness washed over me. His warm, amused gaze left me flushed and tingly, and a bit out of sorts, which was a new and unsettling feeling for me.

I tried to ignore the weird feeling, pushing it aside, and blaming it on the buzz of alcohol.

But even when the lights had lowered and I had hit the dance floor with my newly acquainted friends, my eyes kept constantly falling on the alpha.

Every time I looked at him, my stomach got the swirly swoops, and heat rushed through my body.

I told myself it was the alcohol I had already consumed and the swarm of bodies around me. Nothing at all to do with the tall, broad man I could see watching me from where I shook my booty to the beat.

How would his darker skin look next to my paler shade of white ?

Was he that lovely shade of tan all over?

Shaking my head against my random, wayward thoughts, I turned my attention back to the music and the alphas already filling the space.

Maybe I put a little extra shakity shake in my hips, when I realized those dark eyes of his were watching me.

What can I say? I have middle child syndrome in spades, and I loved the attention.

I especially loved the attention from a delicious looking alpha like him.

Deciding I had had enough of the eye fucking we were both doing from across the room, I'd sashayed up and taken his drink right out of his hand.

Downing the very expensive, top-shelf whiskey without batting an eye.

Flirting wildly, I'd then left him to head back to the dance floor.

Hoping he would take the hint and make a move already.

There were plenty of other options here tonight, available alphas, but I wanted him.

It had been a very long time since an alpha had held my attention like this one, or made my stomach feel like it was spinning crazily when I looked at him.

Admittedly, I hadn't planned to spend my New Year's Eve alone when I had booked this package at the beginning of the year. I was supposed to be here with my bestie, Bennett. But this summer Bennett had met his fated mate, Shay, gotten unexpectedly knocked up, and had fallen in love. In that order.

I was happy for Bennett, I really was, even if babies and fated mates weren't in my life plan.

Until Bennett had met Shay, I didn't really believe all that fated mates nonsense.

Having a front row seat to Bennett and Shay's love story had me almost believing in fated mates.

Almost. Still didn't mean I completely believed that you could meet someone, and know in an instant that they were your be all, end all, soul mate.

And babies? Ew, no thank you. As a pediatric nurse, I worked with crotch goblins all day long. Don't get me wrong, I loved it. Loved all my little patients. But as I explained to Bennett on more than one occasion, it was because I could give all those kids right back to their loving parents.

But diapers, and two a.m. feedings, were not for me. Goddess, being tied down to one alpha wasn't for me either. I was having way too much fun doing who I wanted, when I wanted, and not being bound to any of them.

Though, I would admit only to myself, seeing the way Bennett and Shay were together, sometimes I got a little pang of...

I would not call it jealousy! Because I wasn't jealous of Bennett.

I wasn't! Bennett was like my brother, and he deserved ALL the happiness.

But a part of me—a very tiny, well-hidden part—wondered what it felt like to have someone look at me the way Shay looked at Bennett.

And Bennett looked at Shay. They were always making googly eyes at each other.

Sharing soft, secret looks, or inside jokes that only they understood .

Now Bennett was literally about to pop a pup out in less than three weeks' time.

Nope, this was definitely not how I had planned on ringing in the new year.

But Bennett had insisted I still come since I couldn't get a refund.

Especially when at his doctor's appointment two days ago, his doctor had assured us both that this baby wasn't coming anytime soon.

So here I was, hours from home, alone. With a hotel room for the night, an unlimited buffet of heavenly food, a cash bar that I was completely taking advantage of, and a slew of single alphas to choose from.

Any one of which, I planned on ringing in the new year with.

Preferably the hottie whose drink I had swiped.

I had seen the black band on his wrist, indicating he had paid for the drink package, so he could replace that expensive drink at no charge to himself.

Which meant I didn't feel one tiny bit of guilt for stealing his drink.

Not that I would have anyway. I seldom felt guilty for anything I did.

Two alphas surrounded me, dancing and grinding and rubbing against me in all the right spots. I tried to ignore the way my eyes kept glancing over to see if the alpha at the bar was paying any attention.

When I saw he was watching me, his dark eyes tracking my movements, I sensually



moved my body between the two alphas that had me sandwiched between them.

Arms wound around me from both sides, rubbing down my body and it was nice.

Really nice, and for half a second, I entertained the idea of going upstairs with both of them.

But they weren't who I wanted.

I could feel his dark gaze on us, his eyes burning into me from across the room as I rocked my hips against the hard cock pressing against my ass.

Looking away from him, I focused on the two alphas caressing my body.

It was in those few seconds that I took my eyes from him, he must have moved.

Stomping across the dance floor, until he was standing in front of me, growling at the other two alphas.

Growling! How the fuck had I lived twenty-nine years without realizing what a fucking turn on growling was?

By the fierce look he cast over me, he might have been growling at me too, and not just the men dancing with me.

The exchange taking place between the three men fell over my ears, not registering, until he growled the word, 'Mine!' . I was too busy being swept away by his scent, the heat of his body as he stood near me, the sexy-as-fuck growls that rumbled possessively from the back of his throat.

The way he declared me as his had my body shivering with anticipation and need.

No one had ever claimed me as theirs before. Even though I had told myself it was something I didn't want to happen—to be claimed by anyone—his growled word had my slick soaking my backside .

The alphas that had been grinding against me had backed off at his approach. One had seemed to take offense to his interruption but had quickly backed down. Whether from the fierce look of ownership on his face, or his growled word of possession, I didn't know or care.

They moved away, vanished like smoke into the throng of people, and I was lost in the dark heat of the alpha's eyes, my alpha. Lost in his musky, alluring scent that surrounded me, barely aware of the people chanting the countdown to the new year around us for a few seconds.

“One,” I whispered, as the clock struck midnight, and he bent his head and claimed my mouth with his firm lips.

Electric shocks raced across my skin when we touched, zapping all my cells and nerve endings and bringing them to life.

His tongue tangled with mine in the sweetest, hottest, breath-stealing kiss I had ever experienced in my entire life.

And I'd kissed my fair share of alphas, betas, and even an occasional omega.

But this man leveled up in the kissing game.

With that one kiss he claimed my soul.

He claimed me .

When the kiss finished, we both stared at each other, a bit dazed. My body was on fire, heat whooshing through me like a gasoline fueled blaze, my ass wet with my slick.

Grabbing him by the back of the neck, I pulled him down for another kiss. Because I needed more. More kisses from him, more touches, just more . I needed all of him .

Needed this man's naked skin against mine, needed his cock inside me right fucking now or I was sure I was going to die. Needed his knot filling me, stretching me wide, impaling me and binding us together. Needed him to breed me, possess me, own me.

If I didn't know better, I would think my heat was coming on, but that was impossible. It was nowhere close to time for my heat. There was no denying my body was burning for this man, my mind muddled with booze and lust.

"My room," he growled in that low, throaty voice of his and all I could do was nod helplessly and let him lead me off the dance floor and out of the crowded ballroom.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

### Chapter Three

Alex

Pushing the omega against the closed doors of the elevator, my lips demanded as I kissed him, not giving an inch. His much smaller, lithe body melted into me, his slender arms wrapping around my neck, fingers tangling in my thick hair.

The doors dinged, but we were so caught up in each other, the sound didn't register at first. Until we were stumbling out into the hallway, barely able to catch each other so that we didn't land in a pile of tangled limbs on the carpeted floor.

Still, our lips barely left each other, teasing and tasting, not able to get enough. Our hands never stopped roaming and touching anywhere we could .

This man, this omega, was the most intoxicating thing I had ever tasted.

More potent than the expensive whiskey that warmed my belly nicely.

I couldn't get enough of him. His skin burned with heat, fire simmering just beneath the surface of his supple, pale flesh.

I loved the way his skin looked next to mine, brown against white, the contrast stark but beautiful.

My hand fumbled behind my back, as I tried unsuccessfully to slide the keycard into the slot without letting go of the softly panting man in my arms. Frustration, at the

door and the fact that we weren't naked yet, had another low growl rumbling from my throat.

Finally, the door opened and we tumbled inside.

His nimble fingers had the buttons of my shirt undone before I even gave the door a shove and it closed with a loud bang.

Yanking the material of my expensive dress shirt out of my black slacks, I shoved it down my arms, nearly ripping it in two to get it off.

His blue eyes watched me strip it off and toss it haphazardly behind me.

For a second, I preened under his heated stare, watching as his pink tongue poked out from between his berry-colored lips.

He licked his pouty lower lip hungrily, and I was glad for the time I took each day at the gym that helped keep my chest and abs toned.

"Damn!" he moaned, running his hands over my pecs and down my stomach. I shivered under his exploring fingers, then sucked in a sharp breath when his hand ran over the bulge of my aching cock, squeezing lightly. "You are so fucking hot!"

Smirking and fighting the urge to strut around the room, showing off for my mate, I pulled him flush against me.

He peered up at me from beneath his ridiculously long, dark lashes, pupils blown, eyes shining brightly with need.

Glitter shimmered on his purple tinted lids and across his high cheekbones.

He looked lust drunk, or maybe just drunk, and a frisson of reality poked at my brain, sobering me.

“How drunk are you?” Because consent was a thing I took very strongly, and I wouldn’t continue any further if he was too drunk to know what was really happening. It might kill me to end it now, but I would.

The little brat smirked up at me, and I had the very real urge to find out what my hand on his ass would feel like.

He stripped off his sheer top and tossed it over the TV.

“I’m not that drunk, if you’re worried about consent.

Though the fact that you are goes in the plus column.

I want this. I want you. And I know exactly what is happening. ”

“Do you?”

He nodded, pushing his skirt down his shapely legs.

He’d snagged whatever underwear he had on with it—if he was even wearing any at all—because his slim hard cock bobbed towards his very toned stomach.

He didn’t have the definition of muscles I did, but there wasn’t an ounce of fat on him anywhere.

His pale skin was taut over toned limbs, his hip bones jutting out starkly.

There was a nicely trimmed patch of dark hair surrounding that pretty cock of his,

and my mouth watered as I drank in the sight of him.

He was naked now, except for those heeled boots he was still wearing, standing proud and unashamed.

The sight of him just wearing those boots had my cock jerking in my pants, begging to be released so he could join in on the fun.

He waved a dismissive hand in the air, even as he was bending to slowly unzip each boot.

“I’m well and truly buzzed, but I’m not too drunk to tell you that if you don’t get your cock fucking inside me very soon, and knot the fuck out of me, I’m going to be one very unhappy omega.

I’m also sober enough to tell you to fuck off if I wasn’t interested.

” He snapped his fingers at me, waving his hand in the air down my body, indicating I should hurry up and get as naked as he was.

My hands worked quickly at my belt, fumbling to get my pants undone and off. “Well, we can’t have that.”

He tossed his boots behind him, and I felt a brief moment of disappointment that I couldn’t fuck him while he wore just those boots. Until he stretched his arms up above his head and arched his back seductively. What a stunning sight he was.

My feet tangled in my pants, as my attention was held by his softly swaying body.

He was dancing sensually to music only he could hear, swaying back and forth, moving his hips in an enticing circle.

Thrusting his cock and shaking his ass, his arms doing some kind of intricate pattern in the air that had me mesmerized.

He had me spellbound with his gentle gyrations; I had never seen a sight more alluring than this omega.

And he was mine .

My fated. The one the Goddess had made just for me.

He slid his body up against mine, the heat of him a living breathing thing that threatened to consume me.

“Why do you keep shocking me every time we touch?” he moaned, though he didn’t stop the friction he was creating between us with his thrusting movements, each one causing that sharp snap of electricity to spark where our skin touched.

My brows knitted in concern that he wasn’t quite as aware of what was happening between us as I had thought. “Don’t you know?”

Surely, he knew what that spark meant. That instant, all-consuming need that ignited between us.

He shrugged, not looking concerned. “It’s winter. Static electricity. It’s just annoying, though it’s not really killing the vibe.” His eyes lowered, and he purred, “I don’t mind a bit of pain with my pleasure.”

Tilting my head, I narrowed my eyes, even as my dick wanted to go back to his last sentence and unpack all that. “It’s not static electricity. ”

He laughed, the sound lovely, and wrapped his arms around my neck. Pulling me



down to his much shorter height, he whispered against my lips, “Doesn’t matter. It’s not going to get in the way of me getting what I want.”

“What do you want?” Any thoughts I had of making sure he understood exactly what was happening between us vanished at his sultry words, spoken with so much self-confidence.

Damn, my dick had a confidence kink. I loved an omega who knew his own mind.

It was completely at odds on occasion with the strong caretaking instincts I had, and there was nothing to be done about it.

An omega who knew what they wanted, and wasn’t afraid to ask for it, or better yet, just took it, was like my own personal form of catnip. If I was a cat. My wolf huffed in annoyance at my comparison, but I pushed him away.

“To be fucked hard and fast,” he answered firmly. His hand wrapped around his own dick, stroking once, twice. A bead of precum pooled at his pink tip, and my mouth ached to taste that pearly drop.

Wandering through the seating area of the large room to the king-sized bed, he climbed up, presenting me with his lusciously round ass.

And this time I couldn’t resist what he was blatantly offering.

Following him, I smacked my hand against one of his ass cheeks, and watched it jiggle enticingly, as a red palm print bloomed over his pale skin.

He cried out from the shock more than the sting, glaring at me over his shoulder. But he was pouting prettily which told me he wasn’t too upset about the spank, his pupils large in his eyes.

“That was for being a demanding brat.” I wasn’t about to let him know that I was loving his bratty behavior. I doubted he had been told no too many times in his life. Not with that face of his, those enticing eyes and pouty mouth.

His sweet omega scent filled the air and my cock got even harder, which I honestly hadn’t thought was possible.

The room smelled of peaches, ripe and ready to be picked.

I had smelled the scent on the dance floor, and when I had kissed him in the elevator.

The scent was stronger now, deeper yet sweeter.

Fresh baked pie or cobbler on a hot summer day. Mouth-watering.

Climbing on the bed behind him, I ran my hands over the cheek I had just smacked, then spread both his cheeks wide. He leaned his head on his arms, smooth back arched like a graceful cat, and moaned wantonly when the air hit the wrinkled skin of his glistening pink hole.

Running my nose down his crease, I paused against his hole and felt him tremble beneath my hands. Sniffing deeply, I closed my eyes as the enticing scent of him filled my nostrils.

“ Cielo ,” I breathed against his heated flesh, kneading his ass cheeks in my hands.

He peeked at me over his shoulder, his face flushed, eyes glassy and lust filled. “What does that mean? ”

“Heaven,” I told him, dipping down for a taste of the slick that covered his backside. Swiping my tongue over his wet hole, the sweet flavor of him filled my mouth.

Goddess, he tasted as good as he smelled, and I wanted more!

Lapping at him, like a cat delicately licking cream out of a bowl, I held him still with one hand on the small of his back when he bucked and writhed beneath my tongue. He mewed, panted, and mumbled nonsensical words into the pillow.

## Page 4

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Releasing my hold on him so I could fill my hands with his round orbs and hold him open better, his hips jerked against the mattress. He rubbed his cock on the blankets beneath him, looking for friction, and pushed his ass further into my face.

My nose and mouth were buried in him, surrounded by his flesh, and I ground my face into him. Nothing, and I mean nothing, had ever smelled as enticing as this omega in my entire life. Peaches were going to be my new favorite thing.

“Hold yourself open for me,” I ordered against his fiery skin, and he obeyed, reaching back and spreading himself as wide as he could for me.

The sight was so erotic, so beautiful, that I fought the urge to find my cell phone and snap some pictures of him like this. He was stunning and he was mine .

Diving back in, my tongue spread him wide.

He screamed into the pillow, his body jerking.

I ate his ass like it was my last meal and I was a dying man.

His muscles tightened, coiling, and I knew the instant he came all over the sheets beneath him.

Could smell his cum as it mixed with his omega scent.

He panted roughly, his body shaking with tiny aftershocks, his hands finally falling away from his ass.

He was a boneless, panting, gasping heap and when I flipped him over to his back he didn't protest. His cheeks were flushed, his sweaty hair damp against his forehead, his skin dewy. He blinked lust blown eyes at me, flopping an arm at his side.

"I'm so hot," he mumbled, another little shock making him shake. "On fire."

"I know, carino ," I whispered, running a finger through the traces of his cum on his belly that hadn't been absorbed into the sheet.

He spread his legs, bending his knees wide and bucked his hips upwards. "So hot...need...need..."

His voice trailed off, his head thrashing from side to side, and one hand came up and traced his own flat pink nipple, tweaking the nub.

"I know what you need," I whispered, replacing his finger with my lips and sucking his tiny nub into my mouth. "You need your alpha's cock. Your alpha's knot. "

"Yessss," he hissed between his teeth, his hips pumping upwards into the air, "pleeeassssee!"

"Shh, carino ," I soothed, pulling off his nipple, and nipping my sharp teeth on his earlobe.

Slotting my larger body into the space between his spread legs, holding his restless hips and ass against the bed.

The blunt head of my cock nudged at the hot, slick opening of his hole, desperate to be let in.

"What does that mean?" he whispered, staring into my eyes, our faces mere inches

apart. “You said it before.”

“Sweetheart,” scraping my teeth against his lower lip gently, “it means sweetheart.”

“Is it Spanish?” his hands trailed down my sides to rest against my hips, his slender fingers flexing against my skin. Tight, release, tight, release.

One small flex of my hips and the head of my cock popped through the tight ring of muscle of his hole. “It is.”

“Are you Spanish?”

Chuckling, I let him adjust to my size before another flex had his hole stretching around my cock and he moaned, his hands grasping the cheeks of my ass hard. “Mexican-American. Enough talking.”

How he was managing to even string sentences together was a mystery. I was barely aware of the words I was saying.

Condom! My wolf shouted loud enough to jolt me out of the lust drunk haze that had come over me .

Groaning, I jerked back, my cock sliding an inch out of him. He protested with an angry mewl and his fingers tightened on my ass, holding me where I was.

“Condom,” I groaned, trying to pull out of him the rest of the way.

He groaned, shaking his dark, messy head across the pillows. “I’m on birth control. We’re good. I want to feel you. All of you. And I want your knot.”

As shifters, we were immune to sexually transmitted diseases.

But pregnancy was a real possibility, especially if the heat of his skin and his amped up desire was caused from what I thought it was.

Being fated mates meant there was a real possibility of him going into heat.

Even if he didn't have a full-blown heat, all the books I read on the subject said many omegas could be thrown into what was referred to as a mini-heat.

Heats and pregnancies went hand in hand, and most forms of birth control became less effective.

But staring down at the beauty in my arms, his wide blue eyes burning with lust, had all my common sense vanishing. His fiery limbs wrapped around me. The head of my cock being squeezed tightly by the silken flesh of his dripping wet hole...had me not caring about any of it.

Not heats, pregnancy, or consequences.

I didn't even care that we hadn't exchanged names yet. There would be time for all that. Later. Much, much later .

After I buried myself to the hilt inside him, until neither of us knew where he began and I ended. After my knot had stretched him, then stretched him more, and we were locked together until it receded.

I had waited my whole life for the day I would find my fated mate. Even in my wildest fantasies, I hadn't ever imagined one so beautiful, smelling so intoxicating. The peach scent of him wound around me, making my head fuzzy with need.

Desire burned through me; a want so strong it left me breathless.

Surging forward, I slid into him, stretching him and not stopping until my balls rested against his ass. His blunt fingernails clawed at my ass cheeks, my back, my shoulders. He thrashed beneath me, before he melted against me.

“Fuucckk, yeessss,” he gasped against my shoulder, “more, more, more!”

We bucked together like wild animals, skin slapping lewdly against skin, the sound filling the room.

Pants, groans, gasps, and screams echoed in my ears, drowning out everything but him.

This omega. This pretty omega who was begging me to take him over the edge, to give him what he needed. What we both needed.

My knot swelled, catching on his rim with my next thrust, then another. He moaned, crying out as it stretched him further, nearly too much, before his hole finally accepted it and we were locked together .

One tiny thrust, then another and another, while I watched him jack his own cock in time to my movements. Then he was shouting, shaking, his cum shooting over his hand, his stomach, my chest. His head thrown back; mouth frozen open in a silent scream of pure ecstasy.

With a loud roar, I emptied my balls into him, until I had nothing left and collapsed on top of him.



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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

### Chapter Four

Seth

What was that annoying buzzing sound?

Had I fallen asleep after coming, and left my vibrator on, lost somewhere in my tangled sheets?

It wouldn't be the first time that had happened.

The relentless buzzing noise pierced my consciousness again, just enough to wake me from the sound sleep I had been in.

Ugh, was that my cell phone?

Why? It was way too early for someone to bother me.

Reaching out a hand blindly, I groped for it, finding air where my nightstand should be.

Oh, that's right, I wasn't home. I was in Hollow Ridge, holed up in a swanky hotel room, ringing in the New Year with the hottie alpha I had picked up in the hotel bar .

Or had he picked me up?

Vaguely, images from the night before started to come back to me. Helping myself to

the hot alpha's drink. Dancing with some randos, who were hella handsy, hoping to catch said hottie's attention. Some growling and a lot of kissing in the elevator and hallway. Followed by hot as hell knotting sex.

Yeah, it had been a good night and a hell of a fantastic start to the new year.

Something niggled at the back of my brain, something that felt important that I should remember. Something...nope, whatever it was, my brain wasn't up for braining yet and most certainly not without a boat load of caffeine.

Fuck, my mouth tasted like something had died in it. I had definitely drunk way too much last night. My eyes felt gritty even without me opening them, and when I stretched the tiniest bit, my muscles ached, my well used hole giving a sharp throb.

Oh yeah, I was going to feel that alpha's deliciously large knot for days and days.

How many times had he knotted me? Three? More?

I think I definitely remembered at least three times, but things were still pretty hazy in areas.

I'd had a lot to drink, and then my mind had sort of...

melted. I had known what I wanted, demanded it, but also, like I hadn't quite been in control of things.

It was a weird sensation and hard to explain.

Like a heat? My cougar yawned, stretching.

No, not like a heat, I sassed back. My heat isn't due for months, you know that. It's

way too early for you to start your sasshole shit. Go back to sleep. I don't even know why I'm awake.

Phone , was his droll response.

My phone buzzed insistently, the sound jarring in the quiet of the room even though the sound was turned down.

Hottie alpha mumbled in his sleep, turning away from me and snuggling into his pillow.

All I could make out of him was the long line of his nicely muscled back, and almost black hair, that fell over his shoulders and hid the side of his bearded face.

Sitting up, I grabbed my head in my hands as pain sliced through it.

Fucking hell, how much had I drunk last night?

A lot, by the marching band that was practicing inside my skull.

Grabbing my phone off the nightstand—when had I put it there?

—I stared at the pink device blearily, trying to make the words focus.

Bennett: Seth!

Bennett: Seth!

Missed call.

Bennett: Seth, answer your mother fucking phone right now!

Bennett: Seth, I swear to the Goddess I will make Wade my new best friend!

What the actual fuck was happening right now?

None of the words he had typed made any sense.

And why the fuck was Bennett threatening to make our friend Wade Sinclair his new bestie.

Not that I didn't love Wade, we were like two peas in a pod, but over my dead body!

Which, the way I was feeling right about now, wasn't too far off.

Squinting at the harsh light of my phone because night mode made my eyes go wonky, I slowly—very slowly—typed out an answering text.

Me: B...it's like way too early

I didn't even care that I sent it without proper punctuation. Punctuation could wait for coffee. And a shower. And about twelve hours more sleep. Maybe another round with hottie alpha before check out, if I was lucky.

Bennett: Your nephew doesn't care. I'm in labor!

Labor?

Wait, what?

Bennett was in labor?

Feeling like an icy shower rained down on my head, I nearly got tangled in the sheet

when I tried to scramble off the bed too fast. Hissing at the sharp sting my aching, well used hole sent me in protest, I took one wobbly step then another.

Making my way as silently as possible across the room, I grabbed my discarded clothes as I tiptoed to the bathroom.

There were three dots indicating Bennett was typing, but I hit the speed dial to call him instead. This seemed like a conversation not to be had over text messaging. Besides, my head was pounding way too much to try to text anymore.

“Seth, I need you!” Bennett wailed after the first ring. Bennett wasn’t one for much wailing, so that should have been my first clue that this was not a drill.

“B, what the fuck!” I hissed, shutting the bathroom door with a soft click and flipping on the lights.

Shielding my eyes against the harsh lighting, I blinked furiously against the sting in my eyes.

“You said this wouldn’t happen! You said I could go out of town and enjoy New Year’s Eve.

” I felt the need to remind Bennett of his words just... yesterday? Yes, yesterday.

“Well, my water broke, so the party’s over,” he sniped, sounding like he was talking through gritted teeth. The harsh sound of him panting was all that filled the phone line for what felt like a full minute, until finally he let out a relieved sigh.

“Dammit!” I whined, trying to put my foot into the skirt I had been wearing last night while holding my phone against my ear at the same time.

Losing my balance, I banged into the wall and dropped my phone.

It clattered loudly as it hit the hard surface of the tiled floor, bouncing twice and spinning before it came to a slow halt.

Forgetting my clothes, I retrieved my phone from the floor, gulping as a wave of nausea rolled over me when I bent down.

“Fuck! Shit! Damn!”

“Seth,” Bennett’s voice rasped, “I need you!”

“B, I’m coming, but you know I am hours away,” I groaned, holding onto the cool wall and trying not to throw up any of the remaining alcohol still left in my body. “Where’s your boo thang?”

“Please refrain from referring to Shay as my ‘boo thang’ ever again,” Bennett ordered me, his voice tight.

“‘The baby isn’t due for almost three weeks’, he said.” Muttering into the phone, I repeated his words to him. “‘Go to Hollow Ridge and celebrate New Year’s Eve’, he said. ‘I’m not having this baby anytime soon’, he said.”

“Seth!” Bennett’s tone was as sharp as a knife and made me wince.

Because my head was pounding and also because I knew I was being a complete brat.

“My water broke a couple of hours ago, and I’m absolutely, positively in labor.

Lily is out of town and Finn says it is definitely happening.

Today. Finn! And no, it's not fucking weird as hell that my ex-landlord is delivering my baby and being all up in my private business.

Or that my best friend is hungover in a hotel room, hundreds of miles away, because he had to get some 'new alpha dick' .

It's fine . I'm fine . Everything is fine .

All fine !” His voice rose to an octave I had never heard before, as he tossed my words back at me.

“Anytime you use that many fines in a sentence, you are not fine, Bennett,” I pointed out, unhelpfully.

And yeah, I got that having Dr. Finn Sinclair there to deliver his baby instead of his usual OB/GYN was not ideal.

It wasn't that Finn wasn't a great doctor, he was.

He was actually probably one of the best omega OB/GYN's around.

Fuck, the man was my doctor. But he was also married to our friend Wade, and until just a few months ago, Finn had been Bennett's landlord.

So yeah, I totally understood Bennett's ick factor and slight freak out, on the verge of a meltdown, over that situation.

“Did you miss me telling you I-am-having-the-baby? I need you here to hold my hand, dammit!” Bennett snapped.

“Isn't holding your hand Shay's job?” I snapped back. “He went all territorial in

Lamaze class.”

“Let the Lamaze class go, Seth! I have two hands!” My bestie wailed at the top of his lungs.

“And I need you holding one of them! I don’t care if you get twelve speeding tickets getting here, just do it!

” With that declaration, he hung up on me.

Also not something Bennett usually ever did.

He was really out of sorts, not that I blamed him.

I needed to get myself together, stop acting selfish, and be there for my bestie .

“Well, fuuuccckkkk!!” I hissed through my teeth.

Bennett was always there for me, no matter what, just like I was there for him.

I needed to get back to Sweet Alps as fast as I could and pray to every Goddess out there that I made it before Bennett pushed that baby out.

I had promised him I would be there, holding his hand and helping him breathe like they had taught us in those Lamaze classes he made us go to.

I meant to keep that promise if I could.

Calling him back, I didn’t even wait for him to say hello, before I was speaking softly

“I’m leaving a note for this fine as fuck Latino alpha, getting my stuff from my room,



and checking out,” I whispered, because I was trying not to wake up said fine as fuck Latino alpha, even though I had been smashing around the bathroom making enough noise to wake the dead.

I had enough to deal with right now, I didn’t need to deal with explaining what was happening in my life to someone I would never see again.

Nobody had time for that nonsense. Not when my nephew had decided to make an appearance.

“Do not have that baby before I get there, B. First babies take like forever, and I expect this one to abide by the rules. He is not allowed to be born before his Uncle Seth gets there.”

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“Love you, Sethy.” Because I knew Bennett so well, I didn’t miss the undertone of relief in his slightly smug voice.

He’d known I would call him back. Because we always called each other back, even when we were sniping or mad at each other.

To be fair, we didn’t get mad at each other often, and it was usually because I was being bratty.

“Love you too, B.” Ending the call, I sat my phone down on the vanity and stared at myself in the mirror.

Goddess, I was a wreck. My once artfully gelled and styled hair was going every which way over my head and there was a massive tangle in the back of it.

Gah, it seriously looked like a bird’s nest. My eyeliner was smeared under both eyes, giving me a raccoon wannabe look.

My purple eyeshadow was smudged in one corner, and mostly missing from the other eye.

I still had streaks of glitter across my cheekbones, so I guess that was a look.

Tilting my head in the light, I could just make out the beginnings of a bruise right over my mating gland from the alpha’s sharp teeth. When had he done that?

Wolf shifter , my cougar muttered as if I hadn’t caught his scent, stretched lazily, then

promptly went back to sleep.

“Well, that wolf tried to eat me up.” Pulling my mesh shirt over my head and wiggling my arms in the sleeves, I snorted as a memory from the night before washed over me, making my entire body flush with heat. His tongue in my ass while I held myself open for him. “He did eat me up. ”

Damn, that alpha had been hella talented with that tongue of his. And fingers. And well, fuck, his entire body. Not to mention that big cock of his with the lovely wide knot.

Yes, indeed, we had certainly rung in the new year with a bang. More than once.

But now real life was calling and I needed to get back to it.

Alex

He was gone.

Somehow, a part of me knew the truth, even before I opened my eyes. The aroma of fresh baked peach pie still hung in the air, teasing my nostrils and causing my cock to twitch.

Stretching an arm across the bed, without opening my eyes, I was met with cool sheets and an empty space where my warm mate should be.

Sighing, I reluctantly opened my eyes, groaning when a swatch of sunlight hit my face from just the right angle from the slight opening in the curtains. I hadn't drunk enough to be hung over, but I had knotted my omega three times and I was feeling it.

“Alex, you are getting too old to be having hours long sexcapades with not enough

sleep,” I told myself, sitting up and rubbing my hands over my face.

Looking blearily around the room, I saw that his discarded clothing and boots were missing.

Not that I expected anything less. But I still wanted to hold onto the lie I was telling myself that maybe he was just in the bathroom.

Soaking in a nice, hot bubble bath, waiting for me to wake up and order room service.

Snorting at my own delusions and nonsense, I flopped back against the pillows dramatically. Rolling over into the space he had occupied for a portion of the night, I grabbed his pillow, holding it close to my chest and sniffing it. Yeah, I sniffed it. Don’t judge me.

It smelled of him; peaches and sex.

For the first time in my life, I was going to steal something from a hotel room. This pillowcase was magically going to find its way into my suitcase, and I was never washing it .

I said what I said.

As a lawyer, I never condoned stealing, but needs must.

My eyes caught on a folded piece of paper on the nightstand, propped against the landline phone. Pushing up on one elbow, I grabbed it, reading the words quickly.

Thanks for starting my year off with a bang. It was fun!

That was it. That was all he wrote. He didn’t sign it. He didn’t even give a clue he

knew what we were to each other.

He'd had a good time. Correction, he'd had a great time.

My heart ached with a need I couldn't decipher and didn't recognize.

Maybe he did know, my wolf said sadly . Maybe he's taking the out clause.

My stomach sank at his words, my mouth going dry with dread, and I swallowed against the bile that threatened to come up the back of my throat.

The Goddess Fate had made a few rules when it came to fated mates.

At least according to the legends. One of them being what people referred to as "the out clause".

Which basically said if fated mates decided they didn't want to be together, didn't want to mate, they could walk away.

Go their separate ways, and live a life of happiness, without their fated.

They could even meet, fall in love, and mate with someone that wasn't their fated .

It never seemed to work, from what I knew. Mates could try to walk away, and could for awhile. Sometimes even years, but Fate always got her way, bringing the fated mates back together.

It was that thought I held onto as I packed my bag to check out, folding the note he had left me and placing it carefully in my wallet.

"Okay, Fate," I whispered, walking to my car, the chill biting and causing puffs of

white to form in the air as I spoke, “I’m having faith in you. Because I don’t even know his name, and I have no way to find him. So I’m gonna need you to work your goddess magic and bring him back to me.”

I refused to think about the fact that he very well might be doing exactly what my wolf had suggested.

That he might not want me as his fated and he might be walking away.

And without even knowing his name, I had no clue where to begin to find him.

So far, this year hadn’t started off great.

Sighing softly as I turned my car out of the hotel parking lot towards the highway, I headed for Sweet Alps and home, trying to push away the sadness that was churning in my gut.

The Goddess had put our paths together last night and I need to trust that she would do it again. I just hoped it was sooner rather than later.

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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

### Chapter Five

Seth

“I’m here, I’m here, I made it!”

I’d driven as fast as I dared to, pushing it even on the highway, to make it back to Sweet Alps before Bennett delivered.

Thankfully, there had been very little traffic, most people likely sleeping off their celebrations the night before.

There had been just a couple of cops on the highway but I had seen them in plenty of time to slow down to a decent enough speed for them to not bother me.

Unfortunately, the long drive had given me too much time for my mind to keep wandering back to the sexy alpha I had left in the hotel.

Every few miles I would remember something from the night before; a whispered word, a touch, the way his knot had filled and stretched me in the most delicious way.

It didn’t help that I kept feeling like I had forgotten something important.

The feeling was so strong that when I stopped at a rest area to pee and grab a much needed bottle of water, I opened my trunk and went through my suitcase to try to figure out what—if anything—I had left behind.

Finally I came to the conclusion that the only thing I had left behind was the incredible in bed, nameless alpha and I needed to get the fuck over it. He wasn't the first alpha I had left before they had woken up, and I seriously doubted he would be the last.

There was absolutely nothing special about him, I finally decided as I made the turn towards the hospital. Nothing special at all.

You're never going to see him again, so let it go. Focus on Bennett and the baby.

Fudging a bit, I parked in the employee parking lot, even though I hadn't worked at the hospital in years.

Hopefully no one was paying that much attention or would care, and I wouldn't find my car towed when I returned.

It was closer to the entrance, and I didn't have a minute to waste.

If I wasn't there for Bennett before he delivered, I'd never forgive myself.

My boots clomped loudly in the hallway as I ran past the nurses station, waving to the head labor and delivery nurse as she glared at me. My rotation in L&D hadn't gone great, and she had taken an instant dislike to me. Didn't seem like her opinion had changed much over the years.

"No running!" Her sharp voice instructed as I huffed toward the room Bennett told me had been assigned to him. Goddess, these boots were not made for running and neither were my lungs.

"Bennett's having the—Fucking hell, my eyes! I did not need to see that.



Slapping the door open with the palm of my hands had revealed my bestie pushing, grunting, and red faced. His legs spread wide in the stirrups for the world to see all his parts.

Me. I was the world. Seeing it all.

Gah! My cat cried. We're scarred for life. We can't unsee that!

"Bennett! I love you, but I've just seen more of you than I ever needed to see!"

No one in the room paid my dramatic entrance any attention as Bennett finished with his contraction and lay back on the bed, panting.

Hurrying over, I took my place on the side of the bed not occupied by Bennett's mate, Shay.

Ignoring the judgy squinted look Bennett was tossing my way, I nearly body checked the labor and delivery nurse, Chelsea, to move her out of my way.

She'd become a friend when I worked at the hospital, which was where Bennett and I had met.

She grunted, smacking me on the back of my head playfully, then wrinkled her nose at me.

"Goddess, Seth, you reek." She waved her hand in front of her nose, as she moved to the end of the bed where all the action was taking place.

"You smell like sex," Bennett blinked his eyes at me, his nose wrinkling in an imitation of what Chelsea had done. "A lot of sex. Sooo much sex."

Blowing him a kiss, I sassed, “Don’t be jelly. It’s not my fault my nephew has inconsiderate as hell timing. We’ll be having a chat about that when he gets here.”

“You made good progress with that push, Bennett,” Dr. Finn Sinclair broke up our little tete-a-tete. “A couple more pushes like that and you’ll have your baby in your arms.”

It took exactly three more pushes, along with a lot of shouting encouragement from me, Shay, and Chelsea, before the room was filled with an angry wail.

Bennett flopped against the pillows, looking wrung out. The baby continued to scream at the top of his lungs, making sure anyone in a five-mile radius of Sweet Alps was aware of his birth.

The sound amped up the headache that refused to go away, but surprisingly, I didn’t care. Blinking back the sting in my eyes, I started laughing at the angry wails. I’d heard more babies crying than I could count, but this baby screaming? I wasn’t sure I’d ever heard a sweeter sound .

Clearly, I was sleep deprived and probably dehydrated and hallucinating if I found a baby screaming “sweet”. But this wasn’t any baby. This was Bennett’s baby. Something in my chest exploded with warmth and spread. Swiping at my eyes, I sniffed, happiness engulfing me for my friend.

Shay rested his forehead against Bennett’s, whispering roughly, “He’s here. He’s really here. You were amazing, baby.”

At the sight, my chest constricted tightly, and I gulped. It was an intimate moment between my best friend and his mate, and it made me feel...

Taking a shuddering breath, I looked away, trying to figure out what the weird

feelings were I was feeling. Sadness. Joy. Happiness for Bennett. And Shay, I guess, because he'd had something to do with the baby and he loved Bennett. And the guy was growing on me.

But I was feeling something else, and I didn't know what to do with it.

Jealousy. It was there again. Not of Bennett, but what he had. What he and Shay had. The way Shay cared for him. And now, they had a baby to complete their little family, that also included Shay's son, Lucas.

It was all crazy, because I didn't want what they had. Didn't want an alpha. Didn't want a mate, fated like they were, or otherwise. Absolutely did not want a baby that I couldn't give back to their parents .

But for a split second, I did want it. Wanted that intimacy. That tenderness. That feeling of knowing someone had your back. To take care of you at your best and worst. No matter what.

I was so fucking happy for Bennett, I was. He had everything he had ever longed for.

What would that feel like?

I didn't have time to dwell more on my weird ass feelings.

A wet, red, squirming, still attached by his cord, screaming baby was laid on Bennett's bare chest and my lungs ached.

Staring down at that tiny baby, his head full of dark hair like Bennett's, tears filled my eyes again.

This time I could name the feeling that engulfed me.

Love.

For this tiny little person, who I wasn't related to by blood but was my family just the same. For my bestie, who was living his best life, and had the love of an adoring alpha.

"He's beautiful, B," My voice was filled with awe and wonder. "You did good."

"Shay," Finn called, "wanna cut the cord?"

Shay moved so fast we both laughed.

"Ow," Bennett moaned, one hand resting loosely on his now much smaller belly. "Laughing is not good."

Stepping out of the way, I let the nurses do what they needed to do with the baby, and gave Bennett and Shay a few minutes to cuddle on the extra-large bed .

"Does this little one have a name?" Chelsea asked, handing the baby back to his parents after cleaning him up.

Bennett and Shay looked at each other, grinning. "Brodie. His name is Brodie. Brodie Cian Pierce."

"Brodie?" I wrinkled my nose. "Sounds like a surfer. Did Josh from The Sweet Spot come up with it? Because it sounds like something Josh would suggest."

"We agreed on it together," Shay settled Bennett snugly against his side, scowling at me.

"Mmmm," was my only response. Actually, I liked the name, but I couldn't just

suddenly stop giving Shay shit. It was our thing. Stretching, I yawned loudly, my stomach growling obnoxiously.

“I’m gonna go to the cafeteria and find some food. You want something?”

“Yes! Anything, I’m starving.” Bennett exclaimed, his stomach rumbling louder than mine was.

“I’ll see what I can scrounge up,” I smiled warmly down at Brodie, who was snuggled in Shay’s arms, sleeping peacefully. “If I can’t find anything good, I’ll pick up from the diner.”

“Ohhh,” Bennett moaned, “pancakes. Please. And bacon.”

Laughing, I winked. “Diner it is. I shall return. ”

“Maybe get a quick shower and a change of clothes before you come back?” Shay suggested. “Run a brush through your hair.”

I flipped him off as I went out the door, though he wasn’t wrong. A shower was definitely needed, along with a change of clothes, about a gallon of water and some sleep.

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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

### Chapter Six

Seth

February

What the actual fuck had I done?

I needed to talk to Bennett.

Because there was never a time when you needed your best friend more than when you were sitting on the cold tiles of your bathroom floor, clutching a positive pregnancy test in your hand, after puking your guts up the last week and a half.

It seemed like some kind of cosmic bullshit to be staring at a positive test, when I could barely even remember the night that had caused it.

Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies , my cougar garbled, making me cringe at their off-key rendition of a classic song .

“Please don’t butcher good ‘80’s songs,” I snarked weakly, “I’m nauseous enough.”

He wasn’t wrong though; I was completely and totally lying to myself.

I remembered plenty from the night that had caused this.

Way too much alcohol. Bratty behavior trying to get the sexy alpha’s attention.

Gorgeous flowing locks of dark brown hair, sensual brown eyes, and possessive growls.

Whispered words against my skin, spoken in Spanish and English.

Bits and pieces of that night had started to come back to me, things I had forgotten, over the last several weeks. There would also be flashes, at the oddest times of my day, when I wasn't even thinking about him at all.

Clothing hitting the floor. Hands desperate to touch heated skin. Toe curling rimming. And the sparks between us when we touched. That had been new and interesting.

Of all the times my birth control had to fail, of course it would be the one time I didn't even know the alpha's name.

Because you didn't want to , my cat reminded me, not at all being helpful. Like always, you didn't want to get too close.

Leaning my head back against the cool wall, I banged my palm flat on the floor. "Fuck!"

Dialing my phone, I waited for my bestie to pick up. It was early on a Saturday morning, but I knew Bennett would be up. Baby Brodie and his seven-year-old soon-to-be step-son, Lucas, were early risers. Neither of them had grasped the concept of sleeping in yet.

"Why are you calling me so early?" Bennett asked in lieu of saying hello.

"What's wrong? Are you okay? If you're okay, I'm going back to bed, because new baby.

And it's Valentine's Day and Shay and I have plans later I would really like to stay awake for.

It's been six weeks since we had Brodie and papa needs to get some. "

I had completely forgotten it was Valentine's today, probably because I never had a Valentine. Didn't mean I didn't wish every year for an alpha to show up with roses and chocolates.

Staring down at the test in my hand, I wrinkled my nose. This was not anything I had ever wished for on Cupid's holiday.

"Can you come over?" I sighed, rubbing my temples. "I did something."

"Are you okay?" he repeated, sounding a little more awake and slightly concerned.

"Nope, not okay. So, so not okay." My voice rose an octave with each word, and I could hear the hysteria I was trying to hold off.

"Are you hurt or in jail?" Rustling sounded, and I could picture him sitting up in bed. I felt bad about waking him up, knowing Brodie got up every couple of hours for a feeding. But desperate times called for all hands on deck. And there had never been a more desperate time in my life .

"I'm not hurt and I'm not in jail," I assured him, then swiped at a tear that slid down my cheek.

Crying was so not me! This had to be stupid pregnancy hormones.

Bennett had cried all the time when he'd been pregnant.



Of course, he and his alpha needed to be apart for the beginning of his pregnancy, for reasons.

It was a whole thing, involving a not-so-nice ex, and I was glad they could finally be together.

“Am I bringing coffee, wine, or chocolate?” I loved that Bennett was always so calm, while I was usually the exact opposite and brought the drama. He was the ying to my yang. The nice to my bratty side. The only time he had even hinted at losing it had been when he was in labor last month.

Snorting, I reminded him, “It’s like seven in the morning.”

“And I have two small children, what’s your point?”

I barely know what time of day it is anymore.

I can’t even guarantee the last time I showered.

Honestly, though, if you start clutching your pearls about day drinking, I’m sending the police.

Obviously, you’re being held against your will and that is your cry for help. ”

Because just hearing his voice somehow made me think everything was going to be okay, I laughed, but then it turned into sort of a laugh-hiccup-sob. “Maybe a hot chocolate. ”

“You don’t want a large coffee?” Through the phone I heard the sounds of him getting ready to leave.

The jangle of his keys. Softly telling Shay, his mate, that there was a situation, and I needed him.

That made me smile remembering me fiercely telling Shay that Bennett and I were a package deal.

Shay and I hadn't gotten off on the best foot—mostly my fault, not that I would ever admit to that—but we were both slowly growing on the other.

“Seth?” Bennett's concerned voice made me think he'd called my name more than once. “You're starting to really scare me.”

“I'm pregnant.” Somehow whispering the words out loud made it realer than the pee stick I was still clutching tightly in my fist.

Silence met my admission, before Bennett calmly declared, “Wine and chocolate, it is.”

Hysterical laughter escaped me, along with some smidge of relief. “Did you hear what I said?”

“The wine is for me. I'll pump and dump. It's fine. I have plenty of milk in the fridge for Brodie. The chocolate's for you,” he said with purpose. “Oh, who am I kidding, I'm having the chocolate too. Fuck this baby weight. I'm on my way.”

Twenty minutes later, Bennett was sliding down next to me on my bathroom floor, because I hadn't moved one inch since our call had ended. Just stared blankly at the test I was holding, like the big PREGNANT showing in the little window was going to magically disappear if I wished hard enough.

Bennett pried the test from my fingers and wrapped them around a warm cup of

fragrant chocolaty goodness. The logo from our favorite bakery/coffee shop, The Sweet Spot, had me sniffing it appreciatively. No one made better hot chocolate than Quinn Sinclair, the owner and our personal friend.

Glancing at the test, Bennett tossed it in the trash with a loud thunk. “Drink that. You’re pale as a fucking ghost.”

Taking a small sip, I hummed happily when the chocolate hit my tongue. Hopefully it would stay down, because everything was hit or miss lately.

“So,” Bennett wrapped his arms around his drawn-up knees, and rested his tired face against them, “not the flu then.”

Shaking my head, I blinked rapidly at the prickly heat blooming behind my eyes.

Reaching over, he gave me an awkward side hug, squeezing gently. “It’s going to be okay, Sethy.”

Sitting the cup down next to me, I side-eyed him. “I don’t want kids. Babies are just—” I shuddered. “I mean, your kids are okay, obv’s. But other kids are just a hard pass. You know how I feel about the ones I have to keep.”

He rolled his eyes, shaking his head slightly.

Holding up a hand, I muttered, “And I know what you are going to say. Seth, you’re a pediatric nurse, how can you not like kids?

I like them fine. Because I can give them back to their parents.

But having one of my own? OMG, Benny, I’m barely responsible for myself!

I can't even keep a houseplant alive. How the fuck am I going to keep an entire human alive!

"The hysteria was back in my voice, rising higher with each word.

Bennett ripped the wrapper off a Twix bar and handed me half of it. My stomach gave a negative heave, and I shook my head. "I think the hot chocolate might be my sugar limit."

Bennett winced sympathetically, then munched on the candy bar, closing his eyes in bliss. "Oh, that's good."

"No wine?" Because I didn't see a bottle anywhere, and he had a cup from The Sweet Spot of his own.

He shrugged, "Shay was giving me a panicked look, and I assured him I had only been kidding about the day drinking. Besides I'm driving, so I would never."

Nodding, I knew he wouldn't. Shay's ex had been a bastard of an omega, an abusive alcoholic. He had ultimately lost his life in a drinking and driving accident just a few months ago. Shay still had a shit ton of trauma to work through, but he and Bennett were working through it all, together.

"So," Bennett hedged, after sucking his fingers clean of a bit of melted chocolate, "you're not keeping the baby then? "

"What? Of course, I'm keeping it!" I cried, my tone conveying my outrage at his very sensible, logical conclusion.

Okay, where the fuck had that come from?

I hadn't really had time to think about what I wanted to do yet, but in that split second, I knew I was keeping the baby. My hand traveled to lay across my still flat stomach, resting there lightly. Correction, I was keeping my baby, not the baby.

Bennett smiled knowingly, reaching out and taking my free hand and giving it a light squeeze. "You know you aren't alone in this, right? You have me and Shay, Asher and Gabe. The Musketeers, and your family. They love you, Seth, they will support you in this. We all will."

He named off my boss and his mate, along with our group of close omega friends in our chat group dubbed The Musketeers. And yeah, my family was wonderful, I had to admit. My whole middle child syndrome thing I had going on was all on me, and not really anything my parents or siblings had done.

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But I'd had five years of being the baby before my younger sister, Gilly, had come along.

And even though I loved her dearly, I didn't always like her, and I was still a bit salty about having my throne usurped.

I knew my family would support me, though I'd probably see some disappointment in my mom and dad's eyes.

But only for the fact that I wasn't mated, like my siblings, before I popped out a grandbaby for them to love on.

My parents excelled at being doting grandparents to my two nieces and I knew they would absolutely adore my child.

"And the alpha dad?" Bennett hedged carefully, "Do you think he'll want to be involved?"

Rubbing at the slight headache I had, probably due to all the throwing up I'd been doing and the fact that I knew I was slightly dehydrated, I grimaced. "Yeah, about that."

"If he's a dickwad, he doesn't need to be involved," Bennett assured me. "But I know how you felt when I didn't tell Shay I was pregnant right away. I know you, Seth, you'll want to tell this guy. But that doesn't mean he needs to be involved if he doesn't want to. We've got this."

“It’s not that.” Picking up my cup, I took a sip to have something to occupy myself.

“I...” Blowing out a long breath, I looked at the pattern of the tiled floor, feeling slightly ashamed.

I rarely, if ever, felt ashamed about anything I did, but I had never imagined I would be in the predicament I found myself in.

Sure, I had a lot of fun as a single omega, not ready to make any commitments to a mate.

Settling down with an alpha had never really appealed to me, honestly.

I liked having my own career, coming and going as I pleased, and doing things on my own terms. If I wanted to get laid, I went out and did it, no strings attached.

The alphas never needed to worry about anything beyond one night with me .

And I was always, always careful to keep up with my birth control.

Usually I had a-wrap-it-up-or-get-the-fuck-out policy for the alphas, but I was pretty sure I remembered this alpha and me skipping over that part.

Yeah, I definitely remembered we had. Even if I hadn’t remembered, the fact that I had dried cum on me the next morning, and it was still dripping out of me, was a clear sign.

“I have no idea who he is,” I admitted, feeling my cheeks heat. “No name. No way to contact him. It’s the guy I hooked up with on New Year’s. The guy I was with at the hotel when you went into labor.”

Bennett just nodded, and there was no censor in his green eyes, but he did have his thinking face on. “Maybe Jamie can find him. Or Becks?”

Jamie Sinclair used to work for the government, as did Sweet Alps’ current sheriff, Grayson Beckett. Both men were also mates of good friends of ours. “I feel like they can find anyone. They have tons of resources.”

“Maybe,” I hedged, though I wasn’t too hopeful.

It wasn’t like I had a lot of information for them to go off of.

What did I say? He was a really hot Latino, with a great cock, and he was fantastic in bed.

From what I could remember. Because I’d been slightly more than tipsy and might have gone into a weird, early, shortened heat?

That might have melted my brain for a bit?

Possibly, from what I could remember. Yeah, I didn’t think that was enough for them to find the guy.

“Wait! I have this!” Grabbing my discarded cell phone, I quickly thumbed through my pictures. After a minute of frustrated scrolling, I muttered, “Goddess, I take a lot of pictures of your kids!”

Bennett shrugged, unapologetic, “I have cute kids.”

“Facts.” Shoving my phone in his face, I exclaimed, “I found this on my phone when I was looking through all the pictures I took of Brodie in the hospital, after you had him. I don’t even remember taking this picture.”



” At Bennett’s raised eyebrows, I scowled, “What? It was New Year’s Eve. I drank a lot, okay?”

Bennett grabbed my arm, taking my phone and holding it away from his face so he could focus on the picture I had found the day after I had left hottie McHottie sleeping in the hotel room.

Okay, in my defense, I had left a note. Not much of one, but it had to count for something, right? Right. It totally counted.

The picture was of the two of us, looking rumpled and mussed in bed, both of us smiling like idiots.

It showed us from the waist up, both our naked chests visible.

My head rested in the crook of the arm he had wrapped around me, while he took the picture with his other arm.

A memory niggled at my brain each time I looked at the picture—which was more times than I wanted to admit—of me laughing and telling him his arms were longer, and he should take it.

Bennett’s brow furrowed, and he used his thumb and finger to expand the picture, focusing on the alpha’s face, his long hair tousled, his lips curved into a wide, happy grin.

Then my bestie started laughing, startling me.

I didn’t like the fissure of anger that shot through me, thinking my bestie was laughing at my... my...

Mate , my cougar supplied in his not at all helpful way, and I gulped.

It wasn't the first time my cougar had insisted the man was our mate.

Could he really be my mate? As much as I didn't want to believe it, I couldn't deny the undeniable attraction I felt for him.

The pull. The electricity that raced across my skin when he touched me.

The way he had smelled, the rich musky scent enough that it had started my slick gushing.

I had brushed it all aside, coming up with plausible excuses for it all.

But the heat that had turned my blood to fire, that had muddled my thoughts, my insatiable need to be filled by him...

to be knotted by him...it had felt like I was in heat.

I had brushed the notion aside when it had fluttered across my buzzed brain, knowing my heat wasn't due for months and months.

But...could he—we—really be fated mates, like my cat kept insisting?

“Seth!” Bennett jerked me out of my thoughts, as he tried to grab my phone back because I had yanked it from his hands.

But I stubbornly held it above my head, out of his reach.

I wasn't tall by any stretch of the imagination, but Bennett was even shorter than I was.

Sitting on the cold floor, it was well and truly too high for him to take back and laugh more at the only picture I had of my nameless alpha.

“What?” I snapped, because...because...Goddess, was this what Bennett had felt the times I had been shitty to Shay, when I thought he was causing my friend emotional pain? Wow, I needed to think more about how my actions affected others.

Bennett gave me a wide-eyed look, “I know who that is! In the picture!”

“Wait, what?” Bringing the phone down, I stared at the picture on the screen. The picture that still caused butterflies to take flight in the pit of my stomach each time I looked at it. Which wasn’t that often. Really, it wasn’t. I looked at it a normal number of times. Absolutely normal.

“That’s Alex,” Bennett told me quietly, “the lawyer that helps out with the pro bono cases for abused omegas. The one I referred Shay to when he first got to town. I can’t believe you went all the way to Hollow Ridge and hooked up with Alex Ortega.”

Bennett worked at the hospital here in town in an administrative role.

It was how we had met, actually. I had been working at the hospital at the time, fresh out of nursing school, and he had just started his job there.

Bennett had some big, long-ass title, but the gist of his job was finding services for patients in need.

Whether it be a rehab facility, nursing home, in-home nursing, or something more.

He worked closely with abused omegas and the local shelter, helping them get free of their abusers and get a fresh start.

“Alex Ortega?” I repeated the name slowly, seeing how it felt on my tongue. “Shay’s lawyer?”

Alex.

I liked it. It was a strong name. And sexy.

Just like him , my cat chuffed.

“Are you just going to repeat everything I say?” Bennett asked, unwrapping another candy bar, swinging the chocolate covered bar at me when I gave him a look.

“Don’t judge me. I haven’t had breakfast and I’m starving.

Producing enough milk for Brodie takes a shit ton of fuel. Breastfeeding is hard work!”

“His real name is Alejandro, but he goes by Alex,” Bennett kept talking before I could respond, chewing his cookie and caramel bar at the same time, moaning in joy as he swallowed.

“Alex lives here in Sweet Alps. Seth, he’s like the nicest guy.

If you’re going to get knocked up by a total stranger, you could definitely do worse than Alex.

I mean, not that you want a mate or anything, but... ”

Nibbling on my lip, I stared at the picture, like I didn’t have it memorized already. But now I knew his name. And I knew what he did for a living. And where he lived. What were the odds that we both lived in Sweet Alps, having met in a completely

different town?

Fate , my cougar yawned, already bored with my drama. Asshole cat.

“Bennett, can I ask you something?”

He nodded, “You know you can.”

“How did you know you and Shay were mates?” Maybe what I was really asking was how had they known they were fated.

“You know we’re more than just mates, Seth,” Bennett sat back next to me, scooting his butt on the floor until his back rested against the vanity. “You know we’re fated. Is that what you want to know?”

Nodding, because I couldn’t say the words out loud, was all I could do. I had never put much stock in the fated mates folklore. Until a bunch of people around me started finding their fated mates. Until Bennett had found his.

“I knew the minute I touched him,” Bennett told me quietly, his voice taking on a wistful tone. “He was unconscious and I touched him and my entire world changed in that instant.”

“But how exactly did you know?” I pressed, because I needed to hear it from someone that I loved. Someone I trusted with my life and all its secrets.

“It was like electricity shot up my arm,” he told me, even then his hand ran up his arm, as if remembering that night.

“And something inside me just knew. It’s hard to explain, but for a few seconds, it was like my world just shifted.

And I saw him, and Lucas, and a bit of our future I think.

I think when you meet your fated, your soul just knows.

Like oh hello, there you are.” He shrugged, “I’m probably not explaining it well, but like I said, it’s hard to put into words. ”

“Mmm,” was all I mumbled, but it must have been enough for Bennett, since we knew each other so well.

He turned his head and gave me a long stare. “Seth, do you think that you and Alex are—?”

“I don’t know!” I wailed, throwing my hands up into the air.

“But there were sparks. So many sparks. And need...want...I don’t know.

And I swear there were times I thought maybe I was in heat, but yet, not.

It’s all so confusing! Because I still just get flashes of parts of that night.

I remember a lot, but also I feel like I’m missing something.

Could that something important be that we were fated? Gah, why did I drink so much?”

“Seth,” Bennett said my name softly, “you need to tell Alex about the baby. You need to go see him and find out.” He fiddled on his phone and then mine dinged with a text message.

When I glanced at it, I saw it was from Bennett.

“That’s his contact information. At least his office address and phone number.

I’m not sure where he lives in town, but you need to go see him. You owe him that much.”

He was right, I did owe Alex that much. And I owed it to myself to find out if he was—we were—fated.

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### Chapter Seven

Alex

March

Like every other day for the past eight weeks, I couldn't concentrate.

Instead of reading over my final notes before court this afternoon, I ran a finger over the black ink on the worn piece of paper. Reading the words, even though I had memorized them by heart.

Thanks for starting my year off with a bang. It was fun!

It was fun. Seriously?

My wolf growled, agitated beneath my skin. Just like he had been agitated since the morning I had woken in the hotel room. Alone. The sheets, and my skin, still smelling of our omega. With nothing of him left behind except a hastily scrawled note.

Not even his name.

Certainly not his number.

How could we be fated and he had just left like that? No contact info. Nothing. Hell, he hadn't even bothered to wake me up and tell me good-bye. Or for us to have an



actual conversation about the fact that we were fated.

Which still made dread swirl in my belly when I had to admit that he might not want me as his mate. As each day went by, it was a possibility I had to face.

I had often dreamed about the day I would meet my fated mate, never doubting that he was out there.

Granted, not everyone had a fated mate, but I had always believed I did.

I came from a long line of fated mates—my grandparents, my parents, my many aunts and uncles.

I had faith my fated was out there waiting.

But in all my daydreams, I never imagined I would find my fated in a hotel bar, well on his way to being wasted. Stealing my drink without shame, and dancing provocatively with not one but two alphas. Even now, instead of making me angry, the memory made me smile ruefully.

My fated mate was a brat through and through.

One who liked pushing the boundaries, no doubt to see who—or if anyone—would put him in his place. He needed his ass paddled, and then he needed to be cuddled .

If only I had a clue who he was or how to find him.

My abuela always told me, Alejandro, patience. Fate will make sure it works out as it should.

Bah , my wolf huffed, patience is overrated .

Tell me about it.

My attention was suddenly averted from my musings thanks to raised voices from outside my closed office door. Irene, my office manager, seldom raised her voice to anyone but me. Never clients. And I didn't have anyone scheduled this morning, as it was a court day.

Using my shifter hearing, I stood, intent on seeing what was happening and intervening if necessary. Irene kept my office and me running smoothly, and I wasn't about to let anyone give her any grief.

Hearing the voice, my skin prickled, all my senses coming alive.

"Look, he'll see me, okay. It won't take a minute, and then I'll be gone. In and out. Poof! But, trust me, he will want to see me."

"And I told you without an appointment, Mr...?"

"My name's not important. I'm going in now. Byeeee!"

"Sir! Sir! I will call security!"

"Call whoever you need to, but I'm going in."

Barely breathing, eyes wide, I watched as the knob on my door turned and then he was standing there. Like the dream I had every night, come to life .

Blinking, I was honestly shocked when he didn't disappear like a cloud of smoke on the wind. Nope, he was still standing in the doorway, looking all kinds of sassy, yet apprehensive too. He wasn't nearly as brave as he was trying to appear.

Irene was hot on his heels, her hands flapping and cheeks colored with angry heat.

Holding up a hand to indicate she should stop, I tried to speak.

My mouth opened, but no sound came out, at least not anything that resembled actual words.

We stared at each other, brown eyes to blue, neither of us blinking, electricity crackling between us.

Even without touching him, the air around us was charged with it.

Swallowing hard, I croaked huskily, “Irene, hold my calls.”

“Alex—” she huffed, still poised in the doorway behind... him . The fact that she had called me Alex and not Alejandro, like she normally did, told me just how off-kilter she was.

“Hold my calls,” I repeated softly.

He licked his dark reddish-purple lips tinted with that same shining gloss he had been wearing that night, but he never took his gaze from mine. Smugly, he said, “I told you he would see me.”

Tilting my head, I narrowed my eyes at him, my lips fighting a smile.

Brat .

Irene looked to me for confirmation, and I gave a slight nod of my head.

“Does your guest require anything?” Her tone was cool with a slight snip to it.

Oh, yeah, she was not happy with me. Not that I blamed her. She did her job exceptionally well, and she took being my gatekeeper seriously. And while I appreciated everything she did for me, and in keeping my office running smoothly, I needed privacy and to not be interrupted.

“Um...” this was the first time I saw a crack in his bravado armor that he had wrapped himself in, and he swallowed hard, nibbling on his bottom lip. “Could I...do you have a Sprite? Or something like that? Ginger-ale?”

Reaching into the mini-fridge I kept beside my desk, I pulled out a green can of the lemon-lime soda. Popping the top, I slid it across the desk towards him. “I have it. Thank you, Irene. Close the door, please.”

“You’ll buzz if you need anything?” She was still looking at him like she didn’t trust he wasn’t up to no good, or there to start any trouble. I had no doubt he was absolutely here to start some kind of trouble, and I was surprisingly okay with it.

“Of course,” I assured her, flashing a smile. “We’ll be fine, won’t we Mr.—?”

Taking a deep breath, he straightened his shoulders, and that mischievous gleam I remembered well lit up his eyes. Flashing Irene a smirk, he waggled his fingers at her in a slightly shooing motion, declaring, “We’ll be just fine.”

Irene gave him the stink eye, but she closed the door, a bit harder than necessary. Letting me know I’d be getting an earful later. And it didn’t escape my notice he still hadn’t supplied me with even his last name.

Waving to one of the empty chairs in front of my desk, I sat back down, leaning back casually in my leather chair. While he slid gracefully into the empty chair, reaching for the cold can and taking a sip, I observed him quietly.

He was just as beautiful as I remembered, though there was a slightly fragile air about him today.

His dark hair was styled in a messy tousle that accentuated his high cheekbones and pouty lips.

His pale skin held a slightly green tint to it, and there were dark circles bruising the delicate skin beneath his gorgeous aqua eyes.

That and him asking for the fizzy soda made me wonder if he was ill.

Concern took over my body, and I had to tamp down all my natural caregiving instincts.

Something told me he wouldn't appreciate them at the moment.

His beautiful eyes were once again rimmed in black liner, though toned down from New Year's.

And his ridiculously long, dark lashes were curled.

The effect made his eyes pop and drew your attention to them.

It was the only make up he was wearing today, and the scruff on his cheeks and chin said he hadn't bothered to shave in a couple of days.

It did nothing to distract from his beauty.

In fact, I found I liked the combination of masculine and feminine he had going on.

A lot. He was dressed in pale pink scrubs, covered in cartoon kittens and puppies, the

color a delicate contrast to his pale skin and dark hair.

So, he was in the medical field in some capacity.

It was the start of figuring out just who my fated was.

He sat the can of soda on the edge of my desk after taking a delicate sip, his eyes glancing around my office, taking it all in. I had about a million questions I wanted to ask him. Like how he had found me, and what his name was! But something told me I needed to wait for him to speak.

“So...” he began, then stopped, swallowing. He took a breath then blew it out.

“So?” I repeated quietly.

His brows furrowed, little grooves forming on his forehead. “You remember me, right?”

Raising a brow, I nodded. “Oh, yeah. I remember you.” Picking up the many times folded and unfolded piece of paper on my desk, I waved it in his direction. “You’re hard to forget.”

His blue eyes followed the waving paper, and I knew the instant he recognized what it was. “You kept that?”

“It was the only thing I had to remember you by.” Besides my memories, which wouldn’t leave me in peace. And the stolen pillowcase, that if I closed my eyes, I pretended I could still smell his scent on. But I wasn’t about to tell him that, because that was just weird .

“Yeah, about that,” he muttered, looking at his hands clasped tightly in his lap.

He took another deep breath, letting it out slowly.

I watched in fascination as he straightened his shoulders just like he had with Irene.

The fragility I saw was instantly replaced by a spine of steel, and when his head came up, his gaze was steady on me. And a little defiant.

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“So, I’m pregnant, it’s yours, I’m keeping the baby, and I really don’t need anything from you.

But I do feel the alpha has a right to know he is going to be a father, and my first doctor appointment is this Friday, at ten.

” He said it all in a rush, took another big breath and kept going.

“If you can make it, or want to even, or even want to be involved, whatevs, you can show. But it’s totally cool if you know you want to opt out.

Just like, I’d prefer if you took the out now, and not later.

I don’t want my kid getting attached if you’re just gonna be a deadbeat alphahole.

And we totes don’t need to be together or anything.

You can still be involved, without us being...

whatever. I didn’t mean to imply it was like all or nothing.

We totally don’t need to be a package deal.

I’m like...um two months now, but you can figure that out on your own, I guess.

I found out on Valentine’s Day. Not really what I was hoping for.



More wanted roses and chocolates. Instead I got puking and a positive pee stick.

Go me!” He waved his hands in a mock cheer .

Blinking hard, I stared at him, trying to get my brain to comprehend all the fast spoken words he had run together in a rush of too long sentences.

Pregnant?

He was pregnant?

Air rushed into my lungs and I scented the air, catching the delectable scent of peach cobbler. My cock instantly hardened, and I scooted my chair closer to my desk, to cover the bulge.

His scent had changed though. It was a bit sweeter while at the same time it had a darker musky scent attached to it that hadn’t been there before.

My mate was pregnant.

With my pup.

Joy overwhelmed me and I couldn’t speak.

He stood abruptly, slapping his palms against his thighs. “Well, I need to get to work. I’m already late.” He pulled a yellow square of paper from the pocket of his scrubs and tossed it on my desk. “That’s the address of my doctor. If you decide to show up for the appointment.”

And without a backwards glance, he sashayed out of my office, slim hips and mouth-watering bubble butt jiggling enticingly. Like he hadn’t just crashed into my life—for

the second time—and dropped a bomb.

Go after him! My wolf ordered, shaking me out of the fog I had fallen into after he had dropped his pregnancy bombshell .

Rushing out of my office, I glanced around frantically at the empty waiting room. Irene pointed her pen towards the elevators at the end of the long room, not even glancing up from her computer screen.

He was there. Waiting in front of the steel doors, tapping one bright pink tennis shoe clad foot impatiently.

The elevator dinged and I hurried to catch him, my long, powerful legs eating up the distance quickly.

Grabbing him by the arm as he took a step into the car, I pulled him back against my chest.

He let out a high-pitched squeak, his arms flailing. Turning him, I stared down into his stunning face. His eyes were defiant, but he licked his lips in a nervous gesture, his nostrils flaring and his cheeks pinking with pretty color.

That same electricity that happened between us that first night was still there, still present, making my skin tingle where we touched.

“ Mocosó Bonito ,” I muttered, fighting the urge to bend my head and capture those glistening lips of his. Did he taste as sweet as I remembered?

He blinked, his fingers digging into my arms where I still held him. “What does that mean?” he demanded breathlessly. “You said that before. That night at the hotel. I remember you calling me that.”

Lips curving upwards into a smile, I translated. “It means pretty brat. ”

He snorted, rolling his eyes and huffing out a short breath, but he didn’t deny the truth of it.

“Why are you getting all handsy with me?” He pushed against my hold and reluctantly I let him go. He smoothed a hand down his scrubs, straightening the non-existent wrinkles. “I told you what I needed to tell you.”

His eyes flicked over to where Irene sat at her desk. We were far enough away she wouldn’t be able to hear unless she used her shifter hearing. Because of client confidentiality, she seldom did. Something told me she might this time, but she would never admit to doing it, if I asked.

“I gave you my doctor’s info,” he whispered, looking annoyed now, but that unsure look was back in his eyes.

Fleeting, yes, and gone so quickly I nearly missed it.

But there, just the same. Even if I hadn’t seen it, I could feel his nerves strumming through his tautly held body.

“I told you, you don’t need to be involved.

There is absolutely no pressure from me.

I’m fine. We’re good. I don’t need anything from you.

” He shrugged, trying to look like he didn’t care either way, but there was a vulnerability shining in his eyes that made my heart clench. “Show up or don’t.”

Oh, he was so defensive! But he was also a bit frightened, I could smell it on him. Not of me, I didn't think, just the entire situation. He was putting on a brave front, but he was scared. Worried. Afraid of the future, and what part I might play in it. Or not play in it, if I chose.

"And what if I need something?" I growled, my words coming out rougher and harsher than I intended them to.

He licked those full, pouty lips of his again, my eyes glued to his pink tongue as he made them glisten even more. "What do you need?"

"Let's start with your name."

His lips made a perfect little O, before he pursed them together. "Seth. My name is Seth."

"Last name, too, please." Pursing my lips, I dared him to defy me, mimicking his look.

He rolled his eyes, and I held in my snicker, before he huffed, "Brown. My last name is Brown."

"See," I told him, brushing an unruly lock of hair off his forehead, "that wasn't so hard now, was it?"

Will you please come back to my office so we can finish this conversation?

"This time, I made sure to keep my voice calm and gentle.

He was like an unbroken horse, skittish as hell and ready to bolt any second.

He shook his head, “I need to get to work. I’m already late. And I have to take off a few hours on Friday. Can’t we just talk then?”

He was trusting that I was going to show up to his appointment, or he was hoping I wasn’t going to and we had nothing more to say to one another.

I wanted to force him to talk to me, to come back to my office and sit down.

I had so many questions for him, the first being did he feel what was between us? Did he know that we were fated ?

Something told me I needed to let him go for now. At least this time, I knew his name. I knew where he would be on Friday.

Stepping back, I put a couple of inches of space between us. “I’ll see you on Friday, Seth Brown,” I stressed his name, liking how it felt rolling off my tongue. Loving the sound of it actually. “Try to be good until then.”

He took two backwards steps until he was in the elevator, his eyes never leaving mine, his chest rising and falling quickly. Then he gave a sassy little laugh, that caused tingles to run up and down my spine. “I’m always good, or don’t you remember?”

The saucy wink he tossed at me as he leaned against the back wall of the elevator set my blood on fire with all kinds of feelings.

The doors began to close, but a question popped into my head, and I slammed my hand against them, keeping the heavy metal from closing.

His eyes grew wide, watching me. “What now?”

“How did you find me?”

“Oh, that,” he relaxed back against the wall once more. “I showed the picture you took of us,” he gave me a pointed look like I had taken the picture without his knowledge, which was the furthest thing from the truth, “to my bestie. He knows you.”

Arching a brow at him, I asked slowly, “And who is this bestie of yours? ”

“Bennett Maxwell,” he replied, tapping his foot impatiently and looking at the time on his phone.

I’d need to send Bennett a massive thank you. What were the odds that Bennett, who I had worked closely with for years and years, helping abused omegas get justice, would turn out to be my mate’s best friend?

Fate , my wolf chuffed, and I had to agree, saying a silent thank you to the universe.

Letting go of the elevator doors, we stared at each other until they closed, blocking him from my view.

### Chapter Eight

Seth

My feet swung idly against the examination bed; the stupid paper gown they had made me put on crinkling with the slightest movement I made.

Or maybe that was the wide strip of white paper my bare ass was sitting on that was rustling.

Either way, had I known I was going to have to strip down and be poked and prodded on this first doctor appointment, I wouldn't have invited Alex along.

I didn't remember them doing this to Bennett at his first baby appointment.

Since Bennett hadn't told Shay he was pregnant right away, because reasons, I had gone with him to a lot of his first appointments.

I had asked him to come today, but when he found out I had told Alex about the appointment, he had opted out.

He did let me know that if Alex was a no show, he would be at every doctor visit I had for the rest of my pregnancy.

That he'd be there, holding my hand and cheering me on, when I had this baby.

Bennett was my ride or die. I was honestly closer to him than my siblings. Not that I

didn't love my older brother and younger sister, we were just all very different people. We didn't have the same relationship that I had with Bennett.

But now I was sitting, bored, anxious, staring at the clock that showed fifteen minutes past my appointment time (which in doctor world wasn't all that terrible), and I was completely alone.

It was fine .

I hadn't really expected Alex to show up.

Sure, he had said he would be here, but alphas said all kinds of things. Most of them seldom meant any of the bullshit that came out of their mouths, especially once they came.

We didn't even know each other, and I had dropped the whole, Hey, remember that hot as fuck night in the hotel New Year's Eve? Surprise! You knocked me up , bombshell. The man didn't owe me a thing.

But I'd be lying if I said I hadn't been playing out every scenario of how today would go in my head, and Alex was front and center.

Prince Charming to my Cinderella. A very tiny part of me hoped he had meant it when he had said he would be here today.

But I refused to be disappointed that he hadn't shown .

"Barf," I muttered, trying to wrap the sheet more firmly around my lower half and covering my ass. "I think I just made myself throw up a little in my mouth. Seth, get it together! This ain't no fairy tale, doll."



Resting a hand across my slightly rounded stomach, I whispered, “We’re going to be okay, little one.

Papa’s got this. We don’t need no alpha.

And you’ll have lots of uncles and family in your life.

” Smiling, I thought of our little omega friend group that had become like family.

They were always there, in our chat, with all kinds of parenting advice.

Or life advice. Or just down for a good bitch session.

Everyone but me had kids, mates, and husbands, so I was privy to all kinds of venting.

Even the best alphas got on their omegas nerves at some point or another.

And kids were kind of my thing. I was a pediatric nurse, after all. I did actually like kids, even if I had never wanted any of my own.

“I changed my mind though, okay?” I whispered to my belly. “I want you. It’s important that you know that. You are wanted.”

The soft tap on the exam room door brought me out of my wayward musings. My mind tended to go off in about a thousand different directions most days, but since I had found out I was pregnant it was about a hundred times worse .

The nurse, Amber, poked her head in and gave me a small smile. “There’s someone here for you. Is it okay to let him in?”

My heart stopped, then pounded so fast I thought it might jump right out of my chest. Nodding briskly was all I could do to answer. She stepped back out of sight and then he was there. Slipping into the room, looking frazzled, running a hand through his messy dark brown locks.

“I’m so sorry!” Alex said, looking around the room with wide eyes.

“My client ran over with a problem we hadn’t planned on—” he stopped with a shake of his head.

“It doesn’t matter. I’m sorry I’m late. It won’t happen again.

I’ll make sure to not book anyone before your appointments.

At least not anyone that might run over. ”

“You came,” I blinked rapidly, willing the heat and wetness I felt swelling in my eyes to disappear.

I would not cry over an alpha showing up for me.

I would not be one of those omegas. Damn these pregnancy hormones!

I cried last night over an episode of 9-1-1 .

Like what the actual fuck? Who even did that? This guy, apparently.

Alex frowned, then noticed the empty chair next to the exam bed and folded his long form into it. “Of course I came.” He stared at me for an uncomfortable minute where I tried not to squirm, then he asked, “Did you think I wouldn’t? ”

Shrugging, I gave him one of my well-rehearsed I don't care either way looks. "I didn't think about it one way or another."

"Liar," he crossed his arms over his chest, and I couldn't help but notice how his light blue dress shirt stretched over his chest muscles.

And dammit! He had the cuffs rolled back, exposing a couple of inches of his forearms, sprinkled with dark hair, and why the ever-loving fuck was that sooo hot?

Shifting slightly on the bed, I hoped the trickle of slick I felt dribble from my hole was wiped away on the paper under me. Because how fucking embarrassing to have a slick hole if I was about to get poked on by my doctor.

Alex stood up, coming to stand in front of me, and tilted my chin up with one gentle finger. "Seth, I will always show up for you. And our pup."

"Why?" the word was whispered, because I could barely get it past my tight throat, staring up into his dark brown eyes.

"Seth, we're fated," he said gently, and I jerked out of his grasp. "You don't remember." The sentence was more statement than question, and he shook his head ruefully. "I was afraid of that. You had a lot to drink that night. More than I realized, I think."

"I...I remembered enough," I whispered, breathing the scent of him in. Immediately, I felt less tense, calmer. "I...I never really believed in all the fated mates nonsense. Not until Bennett. And a bunch of our friends, I guess. I just wasn't sure that's what we are."

I fought the urge to start swinging my legs once more out of nerves, afraid I would kick Alex by mistake. Instead, I let him tilt my chin up with his finger, not fighting

him this time or jerking from his touch. My skin tingled under his finger, warmth engulfing me.

“I think we have a lot to talk about,” he stared deep into my eyes and I was lost in the brown depths. “I brought you something. It’s in my car. Can we talk then?”

“I need to get back to work,” I shook my head and he frowned. “I’m not trying to put this off, even though I keep making the work excuse. I’m really not. But we’re short staffed right now and I really do need to go back to work when this appointment is over.”

“I don’t even know where you work,” he told me, smiling wryly.

“Oh!” I exclaimed, “I work for Asher Pierce, the pediatrician. I’m his nurse.

We’re in the process of hiring another nurse, but we haven’t found anyone yet.

Our office manager quit too, so it’s a bit of a mess.

Bennett is interviewing for the position, and I’m hoping Asher hires him.

Bennett’s leaving the hospital, did you know?

With the new baby he needs steadier hours and weekends off.

Of course, you know. Because you help him, right?

Take on cases he would send you. And you were Shay’s lawyer for a bit, I guess?

Until his ex...well, you know what happened there.

So yeah, anyway, it's just me for now. The docs are running the show while I'm here, and I can't even imagine how that's going.

Not that they can't take vitals, they so can, not that that's all I do.

It's not. I do tons of things, but...I'm rambling.

"I cut myself off. "Sorry. I can be a lot sometimes. You should know that up front. I'm a lot.

It's okay if I'm too much, fated mates or not.

I'll understand, trust me. I know I'm a lot. "

Alex's brows came together, the skin of his forehead wrinkling adorably, as he deciphered all my rushed, rambling sentences. After a minute, he gave me a pointed look. "I can handle it."

He leaned in closer, crowding me a little, and I looked up into his dark eyes, mine wide with anticipation. He was so close I could feel the heat of him, and desire swooped low in my stomach.

He bent his head, the warm air of his words ghosting my lips. "I can handle you."

His lips captured mine in the sweetest caress of my life, that still managed to curl my toes inside my fuzzy pink socks. No one had ever kissed me with such tenderness as this man was doing at that moment. The kiss left me foggy, dazed and confused, yet every cell in my body felt alive.

The door opened, and we sprang apart like two teenagers caught by their parents, as Dr. Finn Sinclair entered the room, my chart in his hands. The man's handsome,

serious face didn't change as he looked both of us over, but his lips quirked knowingly.

Alex ran a hand through his hair, then moved back to the chair he had been occupying earlier.

“Congratulations, Seth,” Finn told me, sitting on the little rolling stool and placing my file on the small desk in the room. “Your urine test confirmed your at home test. We’ll still take some blood today though, so we can check your HGC levels.”

“His what?” Alex asked, leaning forward in his chair.

“Human Chorionic Gonadotropin,” Finn explained, and I added, “It’s a hormone that tells them I’m pregnant. As the baby grows, the HCG numbers grow.”

Alex nodded his head, and I wondered if he was going to pull out a notebook and start taking notes. The image almost made me giggle.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

“We’ll do an exam today, since you’re overdue,” Finn told me, still engrossed in my chart. “You missed your last appointment for birth control.”

“No, I didn’t,” I assured him, positive I hadn’t.

Finn turned to me, his face in it’s usual don’t give me attitude mask. Really, the man was quite lovely, but he had the worst case of resting bitch face around. “Yes, you did. It says we called you to reschedule because I was out of town that week and you never did.”

Suddenly, I remembered the text message I had received stating just what he had said, and also that I had never rescheduled. For some reason, I assumed I had and just had gone about my life. I kept meaning to, but then I would get home and I would just...forget.

Turning to Alex, I saw him looking at me strangely, probably remembering exactly what I had just remembered. I had told him I was on birth control that night in the hotel when he had wanted to stop and get a condom. This was my fault.

“Alex, I’m so sorry,” I whispered, my voice shaky, “I really didn’t remember that I missed my appointment. I wasn’t trying to...” my hands fluttered in the air, “trying to trap you. I wasn’t!”

He grabbed one of my jerking hands in his, halting their wild movement. “Seth, I didn’t think you did. Besides, from what I know of fated mates, birth control—even if we had used it—probably wasn’t going to work anyway.”

Finn nodded his head in agreement, but I still felt terrible about my mistake.

He went over a few more things with us, do's and don'ts, foods I should avoid, then asked if I had any questions.

"I...I think I want to have a midwife be in charge of my care." It was hard to look at Finn at that moment, because he had been my doctor for years, and he was great.

But this was something that had interested me when Bennett had been pregnant.

I had gone over all the brochures they offered here on midwifery and different types of birthing options.

"No, I know I want a midwife," I decided firmly.

"And I want to give birth at home. In one of those birthing tubs."

Finn nodded, and he actually smiled, which changed his face entirely. "We have added a wonderful midwife to our staff. Let me see if Naomi has time to chat with you." He was up and out of the room before I could say another word on the subject.

Alex sputtered then, a sort of gasping laugh, and I glanced over at him. "What...what just happened?"

"What?" I asked, confused.

"You want to give birth at home? In a what? A pool? A bathtub? Are you joking right now?" He looked so shocked by the idea of any of it, that I almost laughed.

"Yes," I told him bristling, "I want to give birth at home. I want a calm, relaxing atmosphere. And I want to use a birthing tub. I find water soothing. I don't want to be



in a hospital.”

Alex’s tan skin turned pale. “But what if something goes wrong? What about pain medication?”

The door opened again and a tall, regal looking black woman stepped into the room, Finn following her. She smiled brightly at me, holding out her hand to introduce herself. “Hello Seth, I’m Naomi, the midwife here. I’m so happy to meet you.”

We shook hands, and then she and Alex did the same. He was still looking shell shocked and pasty .

“So, Finn is here for now, because we like to have all the patients at least meet with the doctors on staff. Since you already know each other, that's even better.” Naomi explained, and I liked her instantly. She put off good energy, very calming. “We’ll do everything to give you the birthing experience you hope for, but as we like to say in the baby business; have a plan but be prepared to toss it out at any given time.”

“Babies do what they want,” I nodded in understanding. “I’m a pediatric nurse.”

She laughed, “Oh good, then you do know. They are in charge and we are all along for the ride.”

“What if something goes wrong?” Alex asked urgently.

Naomi’s dark eyes were gentle when she answered him.

“That’s why we like all our patients to meet the doctors on staff, just in case we need to go to the hospital, or they need to be delivered by them.

But Seth and I are going to have an understanding,” she turned her gaze to me, “that

if I say we need to go to the hospital, we go to the hospital. Right?”

I nodded, “Absolutely.” I would never risk my baby or my own life. And I was well aware of complications that could arise when giving birth. Even in a hospital.

“We’re going to get along perfectly,” she winked at me. “Now, you know no shifting after twelve weeks because it can be harmful to the baby? ”

I nodded once more, feeling like a bobble head. “I do. Is a tub birth an option? I really love the idea of laboring in warm water.”

“Laboring, yes,” she told us, “delivering, no. But for most of your labor you can stay in the water to your heart’s content.

But delivery will need to happen out of the water.

There are too many things that can go wrong, and it’s a risk I won’t take with my patients.

I’ll give you some information to take home today, things you’ll need to have to get your bed and space ready.

And we do rent a birthing tub or you can purchase your own.

They start around two hundred and fifty dollars.

But it’s a good investment if you plan on having more pups and want to labor in the tub. ”

I winced, but it would be worth the hit to my savings. I could always rent the tub, like she said, but honestly, I wasn’t thrilled with that idea. Not that I didn’t believe it

wasn't properly cleaned and sanitized, but it still gave me an ick factor.

"If Seth wants a birthing tub, we'll purchase one," Alex said, and I spun to look at him.

He gave me a soft smile, then reached for my hand. "I'm not going to say I'm on board with any of this," he glanced at Naomi, giving her a sheepish smile, "no offense."

"None taken," she told him, not at all offended.

"But omegas have been birthing at home for hundreds of years, I guess," he continued. "And if this is what Seth wants to do, he's the one that has to deliver our pup. It just terrifies me, if I'm being honest. We just found each other and I don't want to lose him. Either of them."

Tears of emotion pricked my eyes, and I swallowed hard at his words. He gave my hand a light squeeze, and I squeezed back, because I wasn't sure I could speak just then.

Naomi spent several minutes reassuring him—us—about safeguards in place, with Finn's deep voice chiming in occasionally.

Honestly, I heard none of it. My total focus was on Alex.

The way he listened so intently, storing all the information in his head.

The way his warm eyes would fall on me every couple of minutes, and he would give me a reassuring smile.

The way he never once let go of my hand, his fingers entwined with mine.

I was barely aware of Finn leaving the room, and Naomi gently examining me. Her gentle hands palpating my belly, or the internal exam that Alex squeezed my hand through, looking slightly uncomfortable when the stirrups were put on the bed.

My mind was whirling at the realization that this man was my fated, and he intended to stay by my side. He appeared to be all in, but I wondered if it was because of the baby, or if he actually wanted me as well.

Before we left the office, Naomi gave us our due date—July twenty-fourth—then had to explain to Alex how due dates for pregnancies were calculated.

He had assumed, incorrectly, that since shifters only carried pregnancies for seven months, our pup would be due August first, based on the date of conception.

He was counting exactly seven months to the day from January first, and Naomi patiently explained that pregnancy lengths were actually calculated by weeks and not months.

I wasn't convinced he still totally understood the medical math that went into calculating a due date—many people didn't— but he finally just rubbed his forehead and nodded like he did.

We rode the elevator down to the parking lot together in silence. Alex was shuffling the many, many pamphlets Naomi had shoved at him from one hand to the other.

“Well,” I told him when we were standing in the bright March sunlight and sliding my sunglasses onto my face, “I need to get back to work. I guess we'll talk soon?”

He frowned at me, that wrinkle in his forehead returning. “Walk to my car with me? I have something for you, remember? Please.”

Nibbling on my lip, still trying to sort out all my emotions and feelings, not to mention the kiss that had rocked my entire world from earlier, I finally nodded. “Okay, yeah.”

### Chapter Nine

Alex

I could tell Seth was lost in his head somewhere, no doubt grappling with everything that had happened today.

Admitting we were fated. The kiss. That kiss had been pretty great.

It hadn't been passionate, hurried, or anything our previous kisses had been.

Instead it had been sweet and tender, but I had poured all of my feelings into that kiss, everything I wanted for us. For our future together.

Because I did want a future with Seth. He was mine, and he was having our pup, and all the rest would work itself out. I had no doubts. The Goddess had made him for me, and me for him.

I had never been one to believe in insta-love, but I could feel myself already falling hard and fast for Seth. Hell, who was I kidding? I had fallen head over heels for him in that hotel room on New Year's.

Holding my key fob towards my Mercedes, it beeped, letting me know it was unlocked.

Seth whistled lowly, "Nice car. You must be doing a shit ton of business in Sweet Alps."

Smiling ruefully, I shook my head. “Once upon a time, I was a big shot divorce lawyer in New York city. My billable rate was about a thousand dollars an hour. It’s why I can afford to take on so many pro bono cases and have a sliding scale and generous payment plans for my clients now.”

Seth didn’t seem to know what to say to that, but I could practically see his mind whirling.

I hadn’t missed anything he had said in my office or at his doctor appointment.

He had stressed he was “too much”. That told me someone, somewhere, had planted that idea in his head.

I planned to help him get rid of that notion.

Opening the passenger seat, I pulled out the items I had brought him. A dozen red roses and an expensive box of chocolates.

He stared at them like they were poison, not moving to take them from my outstretched hands.

“What?” he asked, looking perplexed. “Why? I don’t understand what’s happening right now.”

“Valentine’s Day,” I told him patiently, which just made him tilt his head and give me a look like he thought I’d gone completely around the bend.

“You said you wished for roses and chocolates and not a positive pregnancy test. I wasn’t there for Valentine’s, or to sit with you while you waited for the test results.

But I’m here now, Seth, and I’m not going anywhere.

So, roses and chocolates.” When he still hesitated, I rolled my eyes. “Take them.”

He did, finally, sniffing delicately at the roses and holding the gold box of chocolates tightly against his chest. “Just so we’re clear, I’m not sharing these chocolates.”

My lips quirked in a smile, “Duly noted.”

“Unless there are coconut ones,” he said, making an ick face. “You can have those, because gross.”

“No coconut ones, I promise,” I made a cross with my finger over my heart. “Cross my heart. Caramels, coffee cream, and a couple raspberry creams.”

“Mmmmm,” he closed his eyes and smiled.

“I did okay, then?” I couldn’t help but tease him, but also, I wanted to know for future reference.

He gave a noncommittal shrug. “You did alright.”

He was a tough one, my pretty, bratty omega, but I was up for the challenge.

“Let me fix you dinner tonight,” I told him, brushing a lock of hair back from his forehead where it had fallen. “After you get off of work. We can talk about all of this.”

“All of this?” he took another small sniff of the flowers, still holding them and the candy tightly to his chest.

“Us,” I said, “being fated, our pup. The future. Do you even want a future with me? ”



It was a risk asking him so soon, and I knew I was probably rushing things, but everything inside me didn't want to wait. Not with him.

“You make me feel things I've never felt before,” he whispered quietly, “make me want things I never thought I wanted before. But I do think I want them. With you.”

My heart soared with joy at his words, but I tried to play it cool. Still there was no stopping the silly, wide grin on my face. “Yeah?”

He nodded, smiling back at me, “Yeah. It's nuts!

It's absolutely insane! I didn't even really believe in fated mates.

Definitely not this instant love bullshit.

” He seemed to realize what he said, and tried to back track, “Not that this is love. Nobody said the L word. Just forget you heard that. Pregnancy hormones, I guess. Maybe I need to eat. Yeah, that's it.

Low blood sugar, or something.” He somehow jostled the box of candy and flowers, until he had the lid off the candy enough to pop two caramels in his mouth and chewed rapidly.

“Dinner tonight,” I repeated, “my place. Let me have your phone.”

Since he was bogged down with his gifts, I slipped it from his hand, tsking when he didn't even have it password protected.

“What?” he grumped, “I get tired of having to unlock it all the time. It's freaking annoying. What's someone gonna find on there anyway, my porn stash? Have at it. ”

Shaking my head at him, I sent a quick text to myself from his phone. “Now you have my number.” I handed it back, and he somehow managed to hold onto it. Next I responded to the text I had sent myself with my address. “What time do you get off work?”

“Um, it will probably be close to six. We usually always have a last minute sick kid appointment, and Asher doesn’t rush his patients or their parents. Which is great, except on Fridays, when I’m ready for the week to just be over.”

“So, we’ll say six-thirty.” I told him, taking the flowers from his arms, and walking him to his car.

Once I was convinced he was secured in, and he had stashed his flowers and the candy—not before popping another in his mouth—I leaned against his open door.

“Anything off the menu? Besides the list they just gave us.”

There seemed to be a shit ton of foods he wasn’t allowed to eat during his pregnancy. Cold cuts? Really? That seemed unfair, though I understood the sushi.

“Spicy stuff,” he rested his hand against his belly. “The pup is not a fan.”

Hmmm, that knocked out my abuela’s tamales she had made me stop by and get yesterday. She always made the ones she gave me extra spicy, but I would come up with something.

“I’ve kind of been craving tacos lately,” he admitted, almost shyly, biting his bottom lip in the adorable way I had noticed he did when he was unsure of something. “Not that I’m assuming you’re making Mexican food.”

“Tacos I can do,” I assured him, bending and planting a kiss on his lips so quickly, he

looked shocked when I straightened back up. Two of his fingers touched his lips lightly, a dazed look on his face.

### Chapter Ten

Alex

“Ugh,” Seth groaned, listing sideways on my sofa and patting his teeny tiny rounded belly, which I found incredibly sexy. I couldn’t wait to see him round with our pup. “I’m sooo full. What magic do you possess to make tacos that good?”

Grinning at him, I placed his sock covered feet in my lap and started to rub absently. He moaned, the sound shooting straight to my cock. “No magic. Just an abuela who taught me to cook. And my madre , and tías , it’s a big family. Besides, tacos are easy.”

Seth groaned again when I hit a pressure point on his arch. “Those tortillas were homemade.”

Frowning, I acted offended, “As if I would buy store bought. ”

“Really? Please never stop doing that,” he indicated his foot I was rubbing.

“Actually, I do buy store bought tortillas,” I grinned, “I was just trying to impress you.”

“Worked.”

“So,” I said after a minute or two of relaxed silence while I rubbed his other foot, “I was thinking we could set the birthing tub up in a corner of my master bedroom. It’s

big and there's a hardwood floor. And I can drag the garden hose in through the window."

Seth sat up, nearly pulling his foot from my grasp, and I worried I had overstepped, gone too fast, asked for too much, too soon.

Hurriedly, I told him, "I don't know where you live, but my house is big. Four bedrooms, a large, fenced back yard. Great neighborhood."

Seth stared at me with his pretty blue, black rimmed eyes, then nibbled on one of his bright pink painted nails. Holding my breath, I waited for him to say something.

"Um, I live in an apartment. Which isn't ideal for giving birth. It's not really big enough for the birthing tub. And the neighbors might not appreciate me screaming my head off, which is bound to happen. What exactly are you asking me, Alex?"

Taking a fortifying breath, I plowed ahead.

"I'm asking you to move in with me. I know it's super fast, but you're my mate.

My fated mate. And we are having a pup. I have more than enough room, and if you don't want to share a bed yet, there are three other bedrooms to choose from.

Though one would be for the baby. I'm just saying, even though we are fated, and I feel...

things for you, Seth, I'm not pressuring you.

It's your choice, and you have choices. I'm fucking this up," I muttered, running a hand over my face and beard.

He shook his head, “No, you’re not.”

“I’m not?”

“It’s all those things you said, and more, but...yes. I think, yes. I feel things for you, Alex. I have from the first time I saw you, even before I swiped your drink.”

“Which you totally did to get my attention,” I smirked, letting him know I had been on to him from the beginning.

He grinned, “I totally did. But when you kiss me...it’s different than any kisses I’ve ever had.

When you touch me, when you look at me...I don’t know, it’s all magnified by about a thousand.

” He crawled into my lap, and I couldn’t remember a time I had ever been happier.

“So yes, it’s all happening way too fast, but I don’t care. I want you. I want us.”

He took my hand and placed it on his belly, where our pup was nestled, safe and secure, his hand covering mine. “Yes. Yes, I’ll move in with you. Yes, to it all. Please, please, don’t make me regret doing this. ”

Capturing his lips in mine, I whispered, “I won’t, I swear to you, I won’t.”

We kissed for a few more minutes, each brush of our lips against each other growing more heated, more passionate.

Our hands roamed over our clothes, under, tugging impatiently, needing to feel skin, until we were both naked and Seth was stretched out on the couch in front of me.

One shapely leg planted on the floor, the other thrown over the back of the couch.

He held his arms out to me, welcoming me, and I sank into him. Our tongues tangled together as my cock slid into his warm, wet heat. His hole was tight despite our foreplay, and he hissed as my cock stretched him.

We stared into each other's eyes as we moved together, our panting breaths and sharp cries filling the air.

This was different from the night we had spent in the hotel. That had been fueled by pure need, desire, and lust. This was something more.

This was lovemaking.

Each kiss, each stroke of a hand exploring curves, and dips, and crevices. Each swipe of a tongue, each taste of skin, and slick, and droplets of precum.

This was nothing I had ever experienced before with anyone. I knew I never wanted to experience this with anyone else.

This was Seth.

My Seth .

My mate.

My love.

If it took the rest of my life, I would make sure he knew he was cherished, wanted, and loved. That he wasn't too much for me.

“Alex!” he shouted as my hips slammed into his, my cock sliding over his prostate, making him thrash beneath me. “Please, Alex, I need...”

“Come, sweetheart!” Our lips ground together in a hard kiss, as we both let our orgasms wash over us. We were so close, but still, we tried to get closer. Hip to hip, legs entwined, hands holding tightly together.

“ Te amo ,” I panted against his skin, over and over, as he lay beneath me in a boneless heap. Tiny aftershocks shook his body every few seconds, his eyes closed, his face slack. “ Te amo .”

I knew he didn’t understand me, and that it was probably too early for him to say it back. He didn’t seem like a person who said those three little words lightly, but it didn’t stop me from caressing the words over his sweaty skin.

Because I did love Seth. Was pretty sure I had fallen in love that first night together. And one day, I knew he would say the words back.

Something heavy was on my chest, making it hard to breathe. A rough tongue licked my cheek, and my eyes flew open. My eyes met golden ones, not at all like Seth’s, but they were exactly that of a cougar.

The large, tawny and black head of a huge cat stared down at me, two gigantic paws planted on each shoulder. His heavy body held me to the bed, stretched out down my length, and was he...purring?

The rumble vibrated down my chest and stomach, tickling, his golden eyes unblinking, pink tongue lolling out the side of his mouth.

“Uh, good morning?” Reaching a tentative hand out, I hoped I wasn’t about to lose my fingers as I stroked the top of his tawny head. His fur was short and dense, not at



all what I expected, and his pointed ears twitched as I scratched him .

Seth had obviously shifted in his sleep, and my wolf quietly preened. I hoped him shifting while wrapped in my arms meant he felt safe and comfortable with me.

“Wanna go get some breakfast?” Not sure what the protocol was for waking up with your partner shifted, who seemed to have no desire to shift back to his human side, I went with normal morning after rituals. At least for me.

The large head shook, a grumble rumbling from his mouth. He stretched, his paws pushing me further into the mattress, and my breath whooshed out of my lungs. “Oof...you’re...heavy.”

Gently, I shoved at him and he rolled off me with another grumble, then proceeded to lick one paw like it was completely normal for me to wake up next to a mountain lion.

Taking a deep breath, I glanced over at him, rubbing a hand over my face and scratching my beard.

“I need coffee,” I muttered, stretching and making my way to my kitchen. The coffee machine was gurgling loudly when I heard his paws coming down the hall, his claws making clicking noises against my hardwood floors.

His body was long and sleek, heavily muscled, his fur different shades of tan and brown, while his muzzle was black. He was a stunning creature, graceful, yet deadly.

Wanna run , my wolf howled at me.

Blowing on the dark, steaming brew in my cup, I casually watched as Seth prowled around the room, sniffing here and there, before flopping down on the floor in front

of my front window. A stream of sunlight bathed him, and he sighed in contentment, laying his head on his paws.

“Wanna go run?” I drained the dregs of my coffee and placed my cup in the sink. Seth’s head came up and he stared at me with his gold eyes, blinking slowly. “You want to get dressed first?”

Another rumble of irritated noise and a yawn.

“Okay, guess not. I’ll just go get some clothes on and grab some for you.”

We could just stay in my backyard, but something told me that wasn’t what my mate wanted or needed. He didn’t have that much time left where he could safely shift before he would be too far along. It wouldn’t hurt to let my wolf out and run with him.

Ten minutes later, I was dressed and had gathered up Seth’s discarded clothes and put them in a bag. He was waiting by the door that led from my kitchen to my garage and promptly jumped into the back seat of my car and stretched out when I opened the door for him.

As soon as I parked at the public access site to the woods, Seth was up and pawing at the door.

“Patience,” I urged, opening the door and letting him out. He ran for the woods, then looked back and let out a sound that I could only describe as a scream. Then he grinned, showing off his sharp teeth, and tossed his head at me.

“I’m coming,” muttering, I quickly shed my clothes, locking my car and putting my keys in a pouch around my neck.

It was still fairly early and there were only a few cars here now.

Calling forth my wolf, my muscles and bones shifted, fur sprouting across my body until I stood on four paws.

My Mexican gray wolf was smaller than most of the wolves that lived in Sweet Alps, and leaner, but we could be just as deadly if we needed to.

But I wasn't sure I'd win in a fight with my cougar mate.

Once Seth saw that I had shifted he sprang into action and was off, disappearing into the leafy tree line.

My wolf took the bait, hot on his heels, but he was much faster.

Finally, I had to concede that I wasn't going to catch up with him.

Sitting on my haunches, I panted harshly.

I wasn't sure how fast my mate's cat was, but he was way faster than my wolf.

Not liking that we could no longer see our mate, I took off at a slow walk, still trying to catch my breath. Another scream echoed through the air, causing the birds in the trees to take flight.

"I hate when he does that," a voice had my wolf turning his head towards the couple walking my way. Asher Pierce had a hold of his twins' little hands, while they toddled next to him, and a gigantic bear lumbered behind them .

Asher shook his head. "I swear he just likes making noise sometimes, screaming because he can."

The bear, who I knew was his mate, Gabe Carmichael seemed to agree. Seth came trotting up then, looking pleased with himself and I swore he was preening. The two little boys squealed when they saw him, trying to break free from their omega father's hold.

"Kitty, kitty!" They cried in unison, and Asher sighed loudly, but let go of their hands.

"Seth, no more screaming. It's way too early for that nonsense," Asher admonished good naturedly.

Seth gave us a slow blink, then plopped down so he was more level to the boys, who swarmed him.

They pulled at his fur, patted him a bit roughly in my opinion, and one even climbed on his back like he was a horse.

Seth didn't seem to mind, taking it all in stride.

He was patient with the toddlers, gentle even with them, and I got a glimpse of the kind of father he was going to be to our child.

Finally, Asher insisted the boys had bothered the "kitty" enough and pulled the boys off of him. Seth stood, stretched his back, extended his paws and showed off what looked like deadly claws.

"Thanks for letting them maul you," Asher told him, grinning. "See you Monday."

Seth let out a soft chuff and the little family continued on their way, turning in the direction I knew there was a body of running water.

I sometimes cooled off there in the summer, but that water had to be icy right now.

We'd had some warmer days, but there was still snow covering patches of the landscape.

Seth whined then, and my poor mate suddenly looked done in. He needed food, and maybe a nap. It was Saturday and we could afford to be lazy.

Letting out a yip in response, I wished our bond was stronger, and we could hear each other's thoughts. We'd get there. I was already starting to sense his emotions across our bond.

Seth rubbed his head under my chin, purring, and my wolf did a happy little dance. My mate was marking me. He rubbed his head over my face and down my neck, paying extra attention to my scent gland.

Soon we would mate claim each other, placing our bite over each other's gland and letting the world know we belonged to each other.

### Chapter Eleven

Seth

Knocking on the open door of Bennett's office, I saw him look up from his computer screen, surprise filling his green eyes.

"Hey, you busy?" Holding up the bag I held in my hands, I offered, "I brought lunch."

"Is that tacos I smell?" He grinned, and I shut the door and took a seat in front of his desk. He cleared away a spot and I handed him a Styrofoam container.

"From the truck we like," I opened my own container, doctoring my tacos with the green sauce provided. It was some kind of tangy lime sauce and I was addicted to it. "I got you spicy. I can't do spice right now. "

"Carne asada?" He let out a moan of happiness, sniffing his food, before dumping the spicy red sauce all over his tacos.

"For you," I took a bite, my eyes closing in bliss as the seasoned chicken, onions, and cilantro hit my taste buds. Swallowing, I said, "Chicken for me."

"So, what's up?" Bennett asked, after a minute of us shoveling food in our mouths like neither of us had eaten in days.

To be honest, I couldn't eat much yet in the mornings, but then I would be absolutely

starving come lunchtime.

Bennett was still chest feeding, so he was always hungry, trying to produce enough milk to keep Brodie satisfied.

“I didn’t get to see you after your interview with Asher yesterday,” I took a sip of my bottled water. “How did it go? Asher is being ridiculously tight lipped, the bastard.”

Bennett laughed. “He is good at keeping a secret. Sorry, I was going to say bye but you were with a patient and I was already late coming in.”

I shrugged. “No worries. But, seriously, I’m dying here, so spill the tea!”

“Well, they offered me the job,” Bennett gave me a shit eating grin, and I squealed, dropping my taco back in my container.

“Fuck yes!” I fist pumped the air. “I can’t wait to work together! It’s going to be so much fun!” Technically we had worked together years ago at this very hospital, but this was going to be so much better. We’d be on the same shifts, and it was a much smaller facility.

Bennett nodded, “I know! But seriously, I feel like I could have gone in with a list of demands a mile long, and they still would have offered me the job. They want to make an announcement to you guys though,” he meant me and our receptionist, because we were pretty much it for staff.

“I turned in my two weeks yesterday. I did tell them they could call me with questions, but I recommended one of my team to fill my position. He’s qualified and it would be much easier on them than trying to fill my position from outside. ”

“You’re going to be a great office manager, B, and the hours will be so much better

for you now that you have a family.”

Bennett agreed with me. “Yeah, these hours were not great for having a newborn, a mate, and a small child in school. It just wasn’t working.

And Goddess love Shay, he never said a word about it, but I could see the strain it was causing all of us.

My family is way more important than this hospital. Though I will miss some things.”

“Are you still going to do work with the battered omega shelter?”

“Yeah, I’m not giving that up, but I may shift focus.

I recommended Marshall for my position here, and he’s been working with the shelter for over a year now.

His omega dad and him lived in a shelter when they left his alpha dad, so it’s a cause close to his heart.

I feel good that I’m leaving them in capable hands.

Fingers crossed they offer him the job, but even if they don’t, I know he’ll continue working with the shelter.

Now,” he stared at me from across his desk, “tell me how your appointment went last week. I thought for sure I’d hear from you, but when I didn’t I took that as a good sign?

” He left it as a question, his eyes hopeful.



“Alex showed for your appointment and you talked?”

Shoving another too big bite in my mouth, I chewed slowly while Bennett stared at me, lips pursed because he knew I was buying time. Finally, I said, “Yeah, he showed. And he brought me flowers and candy.”

“Ohhhh, I just knew Alex would be a cinnamon roll of an alpha. Maybe a golden retriever.” He shrugged, “Either way, I knew he would treat you right.”

“What the fuck is a golden retriever?” I grumbled. “Who makes these names up? And why are they always food, or animals?”

Bennett snorted. “It means he’s loyal, friendly, intelligent, and eager to please. Ya know, like a golden retriever.”

Scrunching up my nose at the image, I said, “It’s just fucking weird.”

Bennett rolled his eyes at me, then waved his hand for me to continue. “So he brought you flowers and candy? That’s super sweet. ”

Blushing at the memory, I ducked my head. “He said it was because I told him I wanted them for Valentine’s Day and not a positive pregnancy test.”

“See! Super sweet! He’s going to be good for you, Sethy. I’m so happy for you.”

“I don’t know what I’m doing, B!” I cried, jumping up and pacing his office.

He let me pace for a minute, pulling at my hair, and wringing my hands, before finally saying, “Okay, walk me through what’s going on in that brain of yours.”

“We’re moving in together!” I wailed, “How does that even happen? How did we get

here? How did a one night stand turn into a baby, and a mate, and moving in together in the span of...a week?" I nibbled on my thumb nail, staring at my stupidly calm best friend, waiting for him to give me the answers to life.

"How did we go from flowers to moving in?" Bennett asked, frowning.

"See! That's what I mean! How did we? I have no fucking idea." Sprawling in the chair, I stretched my legs out and crossed my arms over my chest, sighing dramatically.

"Fill in the gaps for me."

Glaring at him, I gasped, "What gaps? There's no gaps."

Bennett raised a brow at me, sitting back and resting his chin on his folded hands, and waited patiently .

"Okay, there might have been tacos, and a foot massage. Maybe some sex. And then I was just agreeing to everything he said. Like my mouth was just saying words and I had no control over what was spewing out. Move in with you? Of course I will. Why wouldn't I?

I move in with every alpha I fuck." I rubbed at my temples where a headache was brewing.

Bennett giggled, repeating, "There was ' maybe some sex '?"

"Really good sex, okay?" Sighing, I picked at my scrub pants. "Like, really, really good sex. And tacos. Amazing tacos. He made me tacos. Like homemade and everything. No one's ever cooked for me before." I pointed my finger at him. "You cooking for me doesn't count."

“Don’t forget the foot massage,” Bennett supplied, not at all being helpful while I had my mini-freak out. Not helpful at all.

“My feet really hurt,” I whined.

“I’m sure they did,” he agreed, finally asking, “Sethy, what is it you want me to tell you?”

“I want you to tell me what the fuck I’m doing,” I whispered, “because I honestly don’t know. But I feel like everything is out of control and I don’t know how to stop it.”

Smiling gently, he stared at me and I stared back, before he finally asked, “Do you want to stop it? ”

And that was the question that had been haunting me for days.

“I...feel like I should,” I finally answered, “but I don’t think I do.”

Bennett shrugged, “So what’s wrong with that?”

“It’s too fast. Last week I didn’t even know his name, for fucks sake. Now we’re moving in together. Together! We will be living together. I’m a fucking slob, B, and let me tell you,” I stood, pacing and started chewing on my nail again, “he is not. It’s going to be a disaster.”

“Seth, did you forget that you two are fated? This isn’t like you picked up an alpha at the club, blew him in the bathroom, then decided to move in with him.”

“But—”

“Nope, no buts,” Bennett shook his finger at me, then pointed to my vacant chair, ordering, “sit.”

I sat. Because when Bennet used that tone of voice, most people just did what he wanted. It was why he was so great at his job; the man got shit done.

“Listen to me,” his voice was firm, “you are in your head right now and spinning.”

“No shit!” That’s why I had come here for lunch and brought bribery tacos. Because I knew Bennett would be able to unravel me and he would tell me the truth. Whether I liked what he had to say or not.

“So, take a breath, and let’s look at the facts. One, you and Alex are fated mates. Whether you want to admit it or not, that does change the playing field. It just does. Everything is going to be...bigger, better, quicker. More intense.”

My teeth moved from my thumb to the skin around my pointer finger. My nails were going to be a wreck by the time I got done gnawing on them.

“Alex is a nice man. He really is, end of story. Not gonna lie, before I met Shay, I had such a crush on Alex.”

Jealousy flared through my body like a live wire, and my eyes flashed angrily at him.

“Alex is mine,” I growled, and Bennett laughed at me.

“But my crush died the day I met Shay. My fated . No one else even existed but him. Yeah, it’s fast for you two, but it’s not unheard of. It’s like the insta-love I read about in my romance books.”

I rolled my eyes. I hated those insta-love bullshit books. Give me some good old

fashioned pining, with the alpha begging a few times.

“We barely know each other,” I whispered, “what if he...what if he gets annoyed with me? What if he decides in a month or two I’m too much to bother with? Or he doesn’t like my bratty side? Or my messy side? Or...or...,” my voice trailed off.

Bennett tilted his head and stared at me. “I wish you could see yourself the way others do.”

“I do, believe me.” And sometimes, the reflection wasn’t great.

“No, you don’t. You’ve let a handful of assholes get in your head, and you’ve allowed them to move in and take up permanent residency.

You’re so scared of someone rejecting you, you don’t give them the chance to do it.

You do it first. Now you’re terrified that Alex wants to stay, wants you, in all your beautiful mess.

Newsflash, life is messy. Love is messy. ”

“No one said anything about love. No love going on here. We’re barely at like status.” But I couldn’t deny anything he had said.

“You didn’t need to,” Bennett told me tenderly.

“We don’t love each other,” I rubbed a hand over my tummy, already knowing I loved the little person growing there. Was it such a stretch to think I might be falling in love with their alpha dad too?

“I’m so scared, B,” I finally admitted, my voice a garbled, rough whisper.

Bennett came around his desk, his arms wrapping around me tightly in a hug.

“I know you are. You’re not alone, Seth.

And you need to talk to Alex. Really talk to him, like you talk to me.

Tell him your fears. If you’re serious about moving in together, he deserves to know what you’re feeling and why.

Don’t hide from him like you hide from the rest of the world.

Sometimes you’re all smoke and mirrors. Let him see you, all of you.

The insecurities you hide behind all that sass.

Though, I would bet money he sees you just fine. ”

My phone went off then, and I swiped at my eyes, trying to catch the tears that I felt pooled there before they could fall and ruin my makeup. Reading the text, I groaned loudly.

“What?” Bennett asked.

“My mom wants to have a family dinner on Friday night,” I rolled my eyes, sighing dramatically, “and I’m getting guilt tripped for missing the last one.

Guess this is a good time to tell them about this little peanut.

And to introduce them to Alex. Tell them we are moving in together.

Just rip the band-aid off all at once. A one-two punch.

” Running a hand through my hair, I moaned, “They are going to lose their fucking minds.”

“Let them,” Bennett told me. “I know your parents. They are probably going to be way more excited about another grandbaby, and the fact that you have met your fated mate, to worry about much else.”

“I hope you’re right.”

### Chapter Twelve

Alex

Seth had been quiet on the drive to his parents' house. The air inside my car was thick with his unease. He stared out the window, occasionally turning to give me a quick look before swiveling back to the scenery and nibbling on the skin around his thumbnails.

"I should have changed," he pulled at his pink pants, decorated with rainbows and unicorns.

He had asked me to pick him up from his work, since they'd had some last-minute emergency appointments.

He'd said he wouldn't have time to go to his apartment before we were due at his parents' house, and he wanted us to arrive together and not in separate cars.

Rather than argue with some of his logic, I had agreed to his plan .

I hadn't practiced divorce and family law all these years without learning something from my clients. Basically, whatever your pregnant omega wanted, regardless of how ridiculous, you said yes to it.

A happy omega made for a happy alpha.

"You look fine," I assured him. "I'm sure they've seen you in scrubs before."



He shrugged, but didn't say anything, just stared out the window. Where was my pretty brat? Where was his sass?

"Feeling okay?" I asked, trying to figure out what was troubling him.

"Hmmm?" He glanced at me, his blue eyes void of their usual merriment.

"Fine. I only got queasy once today, when one of my patients spewed formula all over me. Newsflash, if you didn't know, baby formula stinks!

Even worse the second time around. I had to change my scrubs, because that stuff ain't never coming out. "

That was the most words I'd gotten out of him since he had gotten in the car. "Good to know."

I wondered if this was a good time to ask if he had thoughts on bottle or chest feeding, but decided that question could wait for a better time.

"Nervous about telling your family about the baby?" I asked, taking his hand in mine. He turned to look at me then, the brief smile he flashed me not meeting his eyes.

"A little," he admitted, "but I want to tell them. About the baby and us."

"I'm excited to meet them."

"It's the house there, on the left," Seth pointed at a modest, well kept two-story white house, with a wide driveway that was already full of cars.

Even though it wasn't even spring yet, and there was still snow covering splotches of ground, the yard was nicely landscaped and made me a little envious. Yard work

wasn't really my thing.

Parking behind a newer SUV, I got out to get Seth's door. My wolf nose caught the scent of meat on a grill. "Who would be grilling in March?"

Seth got out, looking towards the back of the house and what I guessed was the backyard.

"That would be my dad. He grills rain, shine, or in the middle of a snowstorm. Nothing will keep Nathan Brown from his grill." He shook his head, "He's nuts.

Just go with it. We thought we had come up with the perfect gift for him one year, and we all chipped in on a fancy gas grill.

Figured he could at least move it into the garage with the door open, and be out of the wind.

Dad had the biggest fit and refused to use it.

Charcoal or bust is his motto. I think Kyle finally took the thing home with him. Don't really know."

"Kyle is your older brother?" I could feel eyes watching us, the hairs on the back of my neck bristling, but I resisted turning around to look.

He made a shooing motion with his hand, but it wasn't aimed at me. More somewhere over my shoulder. Because now I had to look, I turned around to see two faces crowded together at a side window of the house. They quickly ducked down when I caught them staring.

"That was my mom and my brother," Seth rolled his eyes.

Today he'd left the lids bare, but he had them rimmed in his usual black liner, and his lashes looked longer than normal.

The effect made his eyes appear even bigger than usual.

Fuck, I loved this man's eyes. I could stare at them all day and never get bored.

They were the most beautiful shade of blue I had ever seen, and the mirror to all his feelings.

An older man's graying head popped around the corner of the house, and he waved his pronged grilling fork in our direction.

"You eat meat!" he yelled, I assumed at me, before disappearing back around the side of the house before I had a chance to answer.

"He eats meat!" Seth hollered loud enough for the house at the end of the street to hear, and I blinked wide-eyed at him. "He eats my meat!"

"You better not let your mama hear that mouth of yours!" Filtered from around the house, along with laughter.

"Where do you think I got it from?"

My eyebrows had taken root at the top of my hairline, and I stared at him, not sure what to say to that little exchange. "Did you just tell your dad I eat your meat?"

Seth's shoulders met his ears, and he shook his head. "It wasn't a lie. It's fine. Don't sweat it."

Rubbing a hand over the tiny bump of his belly that was pretty much hidden in his

scrubs, he stage whispered, “They’re going to figure out we have sex pretty quick, Alex.”

Tilting my head at him, I blew out a breath. “We have very different families.”

“I have no doubt about that. Okay, quick rundown of the players in this telenovela,” he talked quickly as he made his way to the front door.

“We’ve got Nate, the old man on the grill.

My mama, Rachel, who is the boss of this place.

Don’t let her size fool you, she can take you down and not break a sweat.

She’s a human in a house full of big cat shifters, and she’s not scared of any of us.

Next we’ve got Kyle, who is two years older than me.

His mate is Toby, who is way too sweet for my brother, but there’s no accounting for taste in some people.

I try not to hold it against him. And their little crotch goblins are Greta and Harlow.

Seriously, that’s their names. And, before you ask, no, we are not naming this crotch goblin something ridiculous. ”

Wincing, I commented, “I’m not sure I like you referring to our baby as a crotch goblin, but I agree with you on a nice, traditional name.”

“Who said anything about traditional?” One hand landed on his hip, and he popped it out saucily .

I was so glad to see some of his spark come back, I decided I would ask what he had in mind for names later. I still planned to find out what had been bothering him on the ride over, but that could wait too.

“I said nothing ridiculous. No one mentioned traditional. Please, Goddess, tell me there is only one baby in here.”

“Are your nieces twins?” I couldn’t think of any other reason Seth had just prayed that we only had one at a time in the middle of his running monologue.

It made sense in Seth’s brain though, and I was doing my level best trying to keep up.

His earlier quietness had been replaced by rapid fire sentences.

“Nope,” he popped the P. “Kyle just has a fascination with old movie stars.”

“Ahhh,” I suddenly got it. “They’re named after Greta Garbo and Jean Harlow?”

“Bingo! Then we have my younger sister, Gillian–Gilly for short. Don’t call her Gillian unless you are armed and prepared for a battle.

She’s five years younger than me, and usurped my youngest child throne.

Yes, I’m still salty about it. No, I’m not going to get over it anytime soon.

Her mate is Regina and we adore Regina. She’s also much too good for my sister! ” he yelled loudly.

“So many things are starting to make sense now.” I grinned at him, then cocked my head when the sound of some kind of scuffle could be heard on the other side of the still closed front door.

“He’s hot! I mean if I was into guys. Looks decent too. How the hell did Seth land him?”

“Gilly, come away from there now!”

“Act right! Your brother will bring him in when he’s ready! And your brother is gorgeous. He could land pretty much any alpha he set his eye on. I love you too, Seth!”

Seth shook his head, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth. “They act like I’ve never brought an alpha home to meet them before.”

Now my curiosity was piqued. “How many have you brought home?”

“What?” He asked, suddenly all innocent and wide eyed.

“You heard me. How many?”

Seth looked down at the ground, scuffing his shoe against the concrete of the walk.

“Um..let me think.”

“That many?” I inquired, my lips quivering, fighting not to smile.

“One.” He held up one lone finger.

Staring at him hard, I said, “I’m the first?”

He huffed, “You don’t need to make a big deal about it. It doesn’t mean you’re special or anything.”

“It sure as fuck does.” I cackled. “I’m número uno .”

“You know I don’t speak Spanish. Stop showing off.”

The door flew open, and an exasperated female alpha filled the doorway. She was tall, with long, sandy brown hair. She was pretty in a girl next door sorta way, and if it wasn’t for her bright blue eyes I would never peg them as brother and sister. They looked nothing alike.

“Oh my Goddess, I can’t deal with this! Bring him in already, for fuck’s sake!”

“Gillian!” A woman’s voice called sharply from somewhere in the house, her displeasure clear in her tone.

“Hello to you too, Gillian,” Seth put extra emphasis on using her full name, and the woman’s eyes narrowed, her lips pursing together tightly.

“Did I not tell you to wait?” A short omega woman shook her head at Seth’s baby sister.

“I’m so sorry that no one in this family knows how to behave.

” She held out her hand as Seth shut the door behind us.

“Besides Toby and me, of course. I’m Regina, this one’s keeper.

” She tossed her thumb Gilly’s way. “It’s lovely to meet you. ”

She was beautiful, her skin and eyes dark, her smile bright. Her hair was wrapped around her head in ornate braids that swished as she moved. I could see why Seth liked her. There was a warmth about her, a friendly aura she put off.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

“Alex,” I introduced myself, taking her hand. Then I turned my attention to the tall alpha next to her. “And you’re Gilly? I’ve heard a lot about you. ”

I made sure to put extra emphasis on the last word just to needle her.

Mostly for fun, but I hadn’t missed the way Seth had tensed when she had opened the door.

It was barely noticeable; his shoulders stiffening the barest amount, his smile just a tad strained.

More than that, it was a feeling thrumming along my insides, our bond growing stronger with each day.

Regina snorted. “It’s all probably true. Especially if you heard it from Seth. These two are like oil and water. Great on their own, but get them together, and...” She left the sentence unfinished, just shook her head.

Gilly playfully pouted at her partner, who rolled her eyes back at her. It was clear they had been together for a while and had that ability to speak to each other without using words. I’d seen my parents do it many times.

“Ah, my long lost middle child has returned,” a petite woman moved towards us, drying her hands on a dishtowel.

She was stunning, despite being in her late fifties at least. Her black hair had just a few strands of gray mixed in, her blue eyes identical to Seth’s, though lacking the



eyeliner he loved so much.

Seth was the spitting image of his mother, which made me conclude that Gilly must take after their father in looks.

The tension eased from him as he accepted his mom's hug. "I missed one dinner, Mama. Don't be so dramatic."

She snorted, "Wonder where I learned it from? Now, introduce me to your fella."

"Good Goddess, who replaced you with a fifties house omega?" Seth snarked, but he pulled her over to me. "Mama, Alex. Alex, my mama, Rachel. She bites, so mind yourself."

She held out her hand, giving me the same mischievous grin her son had used to win my heart, and winked. "I only bite when it's needed, Alex. It's lovely to meet you. Welcome to our home."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brown." I liked her immediately. She exuded a warmth, along with a silent strength, that reminded me of my madre .

"Oof, Goddess, Just Rachel, please," she smiled widely. "Now what can I get you to drink? We have beer, wine, water, milk, juice, pop. You name it, we probably have it."

"I wouldn't say no to a beer."

"Sethy, you want a glass of red?"

"Um...I think I'll just have water tonight," he stammered, throwing slightly panicked eyes my way. Moving closer to him, I ran my hand down his back, hoping to calm

him. “I was on the go all day and didn’t stay hydrated enough.”

Rachel stopped her walk back to the kitchen to turn to stare at her son for a good minute.

“Seth not drinking wine?” Gilly joked. “What, are you pregnant? ”

We were saved from answering, and Rachel’s scrutiny, by the pounding of little feet running down the stairs.

“Walk!” a deep voice commanded, though it didn’t slow the descent of the running children in the slightest.

“Why do I bother?” the alpha lamented.

“No clue,” a redheaded omega, following him down the stairs, responded.

“Uncle Seth! Uncle Seth!” Two little equally redheaded girls hurled themselves at Seth and I winced when they both jumped into his arms at once, and he caught them. They had to be way too heavy for him to be holding in his condition.

“Demon spawns!” Seth greeted them, smacking kisses on each of their cheeks, while they both giggled, talking to him at once.

“Please don’t call my kids such names,” the redhead sighed, though he was smiling. He was cute, with a smattering of freckles across his nose. “Though they’ve been extra demoney today. Must get that from your brother.”

I assessed the tall alpha who had his arm wrapped around the omega’s waist, and knew this had to be Kyle, and his mate Toby. Kyle and Gilly looked so much alike there was no denying they were related.

A door banged, and then the smell of grilled steaks permeated the air, and my wolf sighed happily. The man that had yelled at us earlier put the platter down in the middle of the long, already set dining table. “Food’s on, let’s eat.”

“Nate,” Rachel nodded her head towards me, “this is Alex...I’m sorry, I didn’t ask your last name.”

“Ortega,” I supplied, catching Seth’s indrawn breath. Leaning down, I whispered, “Okay?”

He nodded, “Yeah. Just...yeah, I’ll be fine.”

“Good to meet you, Alex,” Nate vigorously shook my hand, while Rachel disappeared into the kitchen, returning with my beer and a bottle of water for Seth.

“Sit, sit,” she waved towards the table. “I’ll grab the salad. Girls, Grandpa has hot dogs for you since you’re both having an I-don’t-eat-steak moment in your lives.”

Seth gulped, and I saw he looked pale and a bit sweaty. His morning sickness had been getting better the last week, so I wasn’t sure if he was queasy or just having a case of nerves about telling his family about the baby.

Helping him to a vacant chair, the noise and chaos of a family getting settled put me at ease. My family was much the same, though bigger and noisier. Everyone took a few minutes to pass the bowls of sides around and fill their plates, while Kyle and Toby got the girls settled.

Frowning, I saw Seth only taking small portions of the mashed potatoes and salad.

He took a sip of water, before sitting back, his nose wrinkling the tiniest bit.

Seeing the platter of rare steaks in front of him, I surmised it might be the scent of the meat that was turning him that particular shade of green.

Still, he took a steak and put it on his plate after everyone else had helped themselves. Slicing into the red meat, he asked me quietly, “Do you want half?”

“Sure.” Taking the larger half, I slid it to my plate.

“Dieting?” Gilly popped a piece of meat in her mouth and chewed. “You do look like you’ve put on a few pounds. The seat of your scrub pants is working double time.”

Seth slowly chewed and swallowed the tiny bite he had cut off, while my hackles rose.

My lips thinned, as I bit back a retort.

My need to protect my mate was warring with knowing how siblings sometimes spoke to each other.

I knew Seth was more than capable of speaking up for himself, but it was like he had shrunk into himself as soon as we walked through the door.

Like he was trying to make himself smaller, less colorful, less him . I didn’t like it one bit.

“Really, Gils?” Kyle hissed.

“What?” She shrugged. “He has. You can’t miss his ass, Kyle.”

“Seth,” I whispered, placing my hand on his thigh in a small measure of comfort.

He shook his head, but his eyes were blinking rapidly.

If Gilly made my mate cry, all the manners my madre and abuela had drilled into me were going to fly right out the window.

As it was, I was barely hanging onto my tongue.

“Don’t,” Seth whispered, his hand covering mine on his thigh. “It’s not worth it, believe me. They always side with her.”

Rachel frowned at her daughter, but instead of reprimanding her bad behavior, she turned the conversation to me, asking what I did for a living and how long I had lived in town.

I learned that the Browns owned a lawn care service, and everyone in the family worked there, except for Toby and Regina.

Even Rachel took care of the books and payroll.

Seth was the exception to the immediate Brown family, having no interest in joining the family business.

Seth pushed his steak around his plate, taking careful bites of the rest of his food. The tension was back in his shoulders, and he hadn’t joined in the conversation at all.

Nate clapped a hand on Seth’s shoulder so forcefully he moved him forward in his chair, gruffly ordering, “Eat up. You love my steak. Don’t let your sister’s teasing about a few extra pounds worry you. You know she’s just trying to get under your skin.”

Seth stopped pushing his food around, laying his fork down next to his barely

touched plate.

Taking a fortifying breath, he said, “Actually, I–” he glanced at me, and I gave him an encouraging smile and a nod. “We have an announcement. The reason my scrub pants are working double time, as you put it so kindly, Gilly–” he stared his sister down, his voice sharp.

Gilly jumped in before he could finish his sentence. “I have an announcement first! Me first!”

I stared at the woman, not quite believing that she had just cut Seth off the way she had. Jumping in with a what, an announcement of her own? She might as well have been waving her hands in the air as she childishly yelled “Me first!”.

Was this normal behavior for her? It seemed to be. If my siblings and I had ever acted like that as adults, my madre would have–well, we just knew better than to ever act like that.

“Babe,” Regina whispered quietly, “Seth had some news first.”

Gilly waved her fork in the air. “But ours is more important!”

My jaw clenched so tight I thought I might actually crack a tooth, and I had heard enough from her. I would be damned if I let anyone, blood relative or not, treat my mate like this.

Seth stood up, pushing away from the table, which had the effect of all eyes turning to him, and some semblance of quiet taking over the table.

“No, Gilly,” he shook his head, giving her a disgusted look. “Not this time. This time I’m going first. So, kindly, shut the fu–”

Toby loudly cleared his throat, his eyes darting to the girls .

Seth gave his brother-in-law a small, tight smile.

“Sorry, Tobs. Gillian, for once in your life, kindly shut up. You would think me bringing home an alpha to meet you all would be your first clue that maybe something huge was going on in my life. Not like I’m parading alphas in and out of here, every other week. ”

“Just your bed,” Gilly whispered under her breath, and Nate growled a warning at his daughter. The entire table turned shocked eyes onto their father, and Nate nodded at Seth.

“Go on, son,” he urged quietly.

Seth narrowed his eyes at his sister, then tilted his head, a gleam lighting up his blue eyes that I was becoming very familiar with. “Jealousy doesn’t look good on you, baby sister.”

“I’m not jealous of you, Seth,” she denied, but there was something in her tone that told me my mate might be onto something.

“Now, where was I?” He rubbed his hands together, then tapped his lower lip lightly with a finger, as if trying to remember where he left off. Hiding my smile behind my napkin, I decided I would take my lead from him.

“Ah, yes! Talking about me. My favorite subject. Please, hold your questions until I’m finished with my drama. This hunky alpha and I are moving in together. I know, I’m shocked too. Imagine me living with someone. Cray cray! But I’m told that’s what fated mates do. ”

He looked down at me, a sweet smile curving his lips, and put a hand on my shoulder. My own hand came up to cover his, giving him a little squeeze of encouragement.

“Nope, your ears did not deceive you, you heard correctly. Fated mates. Like Bennett and Shay, and well...a whole shit ton of people I know now. Must be something in the Sweet Alps water, and I caught it. And Dad, I love your steak, I really do. But I can’t eat it right now.

This baby,” he put his other hand on his tiny belly, “is not into red meat. At all. Like nada, not happening, no go. That’s it. That’s all we got to tell you.”

He waved a hand towards Gilly, like he was walking the runway at a beauty pageant. “Your turn. And while you tell everyone your news, that just couldn’t wait for me to finish speaking, I’m gonna go throw up now.”



### Chapter Thirteen

Alex

Pushing my chair back, I stood, uncomfortable with the shocked silence that had fallen over the room. Hell, even the girls were quiet, though it was probably more of a reaction to all the adults' energy than understanding what had just happened.

"I'm gonna go check on Seth," I told the group, only to be stopped by Nate standing up so quickly his chair nearly fell over.

"Seth is pregnant?" he demanded, frowning.

"He doesn't even like kids," Gilly hissed, shaking her head.

"He very much does like kids," I turned to address her.

"You are aware he's a pediatric nurse? He deals with kids every day.

Nursing is a highly skilled, hard occupation.

Do you honestly think he would choose to work with children if he didn't like them?

I believe you are mistaking liking them and not wanting to have any as the same thing. They are vastly different."

"And, Seth wants this baby?" Rachel asked, her eyes troubled. "I wouldn't want

someone to push him into having a child he doesn't want."

"Since we've just met, I'm going to try to not be offended by that implication," I gripped the back of the chair in front of me so tightly I was afraid my knuckles might crack.

"I would never ask him to do that. I can assure you he very much wants this baby, and it was completely his decision to have it."

"I'm sorry, Alex," Rachel told me, her blue eyes glistening suspiciously. "I just had to ask."

"No, you didn't, Mama," Seth came to stand by my side, unpeeling one of my hands and twining our fingers together.

All right , I mouthed and he gave me a shaky smile, but nodded, his hand on his stomach, before continuing to speak to his mother.

"I'm not some nitwit kid, who can't make a sound decision.

I'm a grown man, and I certainly wouldn't be coerced by some alphahole to keep a baby I didn't want.

You're right, I didn't want kids, and I don't know what to tell you other than as soon as I found out I was pregnant, I knew I wanted this baby.

I can't guarantee I'm going to be popping any more out for you, you're gonna have to rely on Toby and Kyle for that.

" Seth winked at Toby, who grinned at him.

“Or Regina and me,” Gilly said softly. “That’s the news we have. Regina is pregnant.”

Regina gave us a smile, but her eyes showed distress at her mate’s behavior. Perhaps it was a case of Seth and Gilly’s personalities just not mixing, and Gilly was a tolerable person away from my mate. She must have some redeeming qualities to have a mate as lovely as Regina.

“Well, that’s splendid news,” Nate said, but quickly turned his attention back to me. “But I have some questions for Alex.”

“Dad,” Seth groaned loudly, “I’m twenty-nine, not sixteen. You don’t need to interrogate my mate.”

“Sure I do,” Nate sat back down, implying I should do the same, so I did.

“Ask away,” I told him.

“When is this move happening? We’ve just met you and now you and Seth are moving in together. I don’t like it.”

Seth sat back in his seat, and I raised my brow at him. “We—”

“My lease is up June first. So before then.” Seth supplied, pushing his plate away from him. Reaching over, I moved it to the other side of me, so he didn’t have to be assaulted by the rare steak. Though it really had been delicious .

“And I know you’re a lawyer but is there stable money in family law in Sweet Alps?” Nate asked.

Seth huffed, annoyed by his dad, and crossed his arms defiantly over his chest, but I

didn't mind the questions.

What I heard was a dad who was concerned about his omega son.

There was a ton going on in this family under the surface, but there was also a lot of love.

I dealt with family dynamics daily and was a pretty good judge of things.

"There is," I told him. "Divorce, child custody, domestic violence. I do a lot of pro bono work for the battered omega shelter. When I practiced in New York City, I worked mostly high end divorce cases. It allowed me to amass a nice nest egg. Seth will be well taken care of, I assure you."

"Do you love my son?" Nate asked bluntly.

"Dad! Enough!" Seth stood up. "And now we're leaving."

"It's okay." I reached for his hand, but he was already marching towards the door.

"Congrats Gilly and Regina," he called, opening the door. "Thanks for dinner. The part I didn't hurl up was great. We'll do this again soon, Mama and Dad, without the side of interrogation. Byeee."

"You pushed him too far, Nathan," Rachel told her husband, patting his hand gently.

"You always do. "

Nate had a sad look on his face. "I don't mean to.

I just don't know how to talk to him. I never have.

He's always been so different than me, than everyone in the family.

Wanted different things. I just wanted to make sure—" He gave me an imploring look.

"I'm sorry if anything I asked offended you, Alex.

It's just that Seth can be headstrong and doesn't always make the best choices.

I know you said you're fated, but that doesn't mean you won't break my boy's heart. He puts on a brave front, like he doesn't have a care in the world, but he's got a sensitive soul. I worry."

"I won't lie and say that things haven't been fast between Seth and me, because they have. But I will take care of your son, I promise you. I will protect him with my life. He means a great deal to me."

"That wasn't an I love him," Gilly pointed out and Regina whispered something harsh in her ear.

Staring Nate in the eye, I told him, "I love your son. But I haven't told him yet, because I don't think he's ready to hear those words from me yet.

Seth is someone that puts more value on actions than words.

He's probably had more than one alpha declare their love to him, but they were meaningless words that vanished in the light of morning.

I'm not going to do that. But we haven't been together long enough for me to have proven myself to him yet. "

Turning to gather mine and Seth's light jackets we had worn, I offered a quiet

warning to Gilly .

“I let you speak to him that way tonight because I didn’t want to overstep between the two of you, with it being the first time meeting your family.

But don’t ever speak to him like that again.

You won’t like how it ends. Your cat might be bigger than my wolf, but I can be ferocious when it comes to defending my mate. ”

I found Seth leaning up against the passenger door of my car, rubbing his arms against the cold chill that had taken over the night. Holding out his jacket to him, I helped him get it on, then settled him in the car, cranking the heat.

“I’m sorry,” he said, fiddling with the preset radio channels. He’d listen to ten seconds of a song, then hit the next button and do the same thing. “I shouldn’t have acted like that.”

I snorted. “Honestly, I was glad to see you start to act like yourself. You seemed to shrink into yourself when we got in the house. You’re always so, I don’t know, when I think of you, it’s always full of color.

And that version of you was dulled around the edges. I didn’t like it.” I admitted to him.

“I don’t like it either,” he admitted. “I let Gilly get in my head.”

“She’s...something.”

“She’s not a bad person,” he laughed at the look of disbelief I tossed his way.

“I mean, no one truly bad could have a mate as sweet as Regina. It’s just her and I,” he shook his head.

“Regina is right; we’re like oil and water, always have been.

It got worse when I didn’t go into the family business.

When I went to nursing school instead. I don’t know why.

She went into the business with Dad and Kyle, so it shouldn’t matter that I didn’t.

Dad was upset by my choice, and Mama just said I should do what makes me happy.

Gilly was thirteen when I left for nursing school, but I remember she told me I was a disgrace for turning my back on the family business.

Those were her exact words. At thirteen!

” he grunted. “It’s a lawn care service for fucks sake, not the Yellowstone .

We aren’t protecting the herd from fucking crabgrass. ”

“There’s a lot to unpack there,” I grabbed his hand before he could push one more button on the radio. “I like this song. And that reference would probably make more sense to me if I watched Yellowstone , but I haven’t seen it yet. I get the meaning though.”

He gaped at me. “I’m not sure we can be together when you say things like you haven’t seen Yellowstone . Who are you?”

Laughing, I pulled into a drive thru line of a place I knew did great grilled chicken

sandwiches.

“Are you still hungry?” Seth asked.

“No, but you are.” I ordered for him, already knowing what he liked, and handed him the bag. He gave me a grateful look, pulling the wrapped sandwich out and digging into it .

“Ohhhh,” he moaned, “this tastes so good. How can I be carrying a baby that won’t let me enjoy red meat? You’re a wolf and I’m a cougar. I should be devouring all the red meat in sight. But nope, we got Mister no cows for me in here.”

“Or miss,” I supplied, thinking about a little girl that looked like Seth.

“You’d be okay if we had a girl?”

Giving him a shocked look, I said, “Why wouldn’t I? I have five older sisters. Girls are pretty much all I know.”

Seth choked on his bite of food, coughing harshly, before rasping, “Five older sisters?”

“Yep,” I laughed, “and they didn’t let me get away with shit. But they also protected me from bullies like they had given birth to me themselves.”

“How did I not know this about you?” he asked in wonder.

“Well, I was going to bring this up earlier, but then...”

“My family happened?”



“They weren’t that bad. Your dad is just worried I’m going to break your heart.”

Seth snorted, giving me a saucy look. “Proves he doesn’t know me at all. He should be worried I’m going to break your heart. It’s what I do.”

“I tried to tell him that,” I joked. “Anyway, my madre called earlier and some cousins of mine came in from Mexico. They’re planning a dinner for them, and she wants to do it at my house, because it’s bigger and I have the yard.”

“So...” Seth said slowly, “I’m meeting your family, because your cousins came to the States, and you’re hosting a dinner at your house?”

“Basically,” I told him. “Hosting is a stretch. My madre , abuela , and tías will do all the work. They’ll invade my house in the morning to start cooking, and I won’t have to do much. Supply some beer and tequila.”

“Sounds fun,” Seth grinned, “so how many cousins?”

“That flew over? I have no idea. There will probably be between fifty and seventy people. Maybe more. People will come in, eat, and leave. Some will stay for music, dancing, drinks, you know.”

Seth shook his head, staring at me in confusion.

“No, I don’t know. I have two aunts and two uncles, one on each side.

I have a couple of cousins, but I’m really only close to one.

He’s younger than me, but almost more like a brother.

He’s off in L.A. living his dream of being a popstar, believe it or not. ”

My brows rose at that. “Really?”

“For reals. Have you heard of Robbie Rouge?”

“I have.” He was an up and coming pop star that was rising fast.

“That’s my cousin, Robbie. Our families get together on the usual holidays, but that’s about it. So, I get to meet your family tomorrow? ”

“I would very much like for you to meet them, yes. And for us to tell them about the baby. It will be a good time, with all the family there.”

He looked pensive, before quietly asking, “What if they don’t like me?”

“Not possible. I like you and that’s all that matters.”

I pulled into my drive, hitting the button for the garage door. “I should have asked if you wanted me to drop you at your place. I just assumed. I can take you to your apartment if you want.”

Seth gave me a smile. “I’m right where I want to be.”

### Chapter Fourteen

Seth

So far, I wasn't making a good impression. I was late. Really late.

I had gone to my apartment to change after work, and I couldn't find anything that was suitable for meeting my mate's family. My clubwear wouldn't do, and my regular clothes all felt too tight.

Because a cold front had moved in, I finally found a pair of black leggings that stretched enough over the small swell of my baby bump, and an oversized, white fluffy sweater.

The material was soft, and the neckline drooped nicely around my neck.

It was also long enough and large enough to cover both my belly and my ass.

Which, according to my mirror, was growing twice as fast as my baby bump .

It was important I make a good impression on Alex's family. It was clear from our conversations, and the way he spoke about them, that his family was a huge part of his life. I wanted them to like me. I wanted them to think I was good enough for Alex.

Turning onto his street, I let out a low whistle at the amount of cars in front of his house. And down his street.

He had told me to park in the garage, but there were cars parked in the driveway, so that wasn't an option. Finally, I found a free spot about a block down from his house and walked.

The low vibration of music, and snippets of voices in conversation drifted on the wind, a mixture of both Spanish and English.

Walking into the yard, the house was lit up from the inside out, the curtains all open, offering a view inside.

My heart sped up when I saw a handful of women in the kitchen, but I didn't see Alex.

Watching as one of the women carried a platter of something outside, I figured I'd probably find Alex in the backyard, with most of the people all these cars belonged to.

Opening the side gate, I turned to latch it, when I realized everyone had gone eerily silent. Turning slowly, I was in a sea of people I had never seen before, all staring at me.

Where the fuck was Alex?

Well, this was uncomfortable .

"Hey," I waved, plastering my brightest smile on my face. "Is Alex here?"

A woman who looked a lot like Alex cupped her hands around her mouth and yelled, "Alejandro!"

"Carmen, I'm right here," Alex came out of the door leading from the garage,

carrying a case of beer.

His eyes lit up when he saw me, and he handed the beer to the closest person, and hurried over to me. Folding me in his arms, he kissed me, and all my trepidation disappeared.

“Sorry I’m late,” I whispered, clinging to his shirt. “Nothing fits. Or wasn’t appropriate, or both.”

He stepped back to take in my outfit, smiling. “You look beautiful. But you always do.” He ran a finger over my cheekbone. “No makeup?”

Nibbling on my lower lip, I shrugged. “I wasn’t sure...Some people don’t...I wanted to make a good first impression on your family.”

“Carino, they will adore you no matter what. Don’t be afraid to be yourself.”

Closing my eyes against the onslaught of emotions his words hit me with, I nodded. “Next time.”

“You look beautiful, with or without the makeup.”

He grabbed me by my hand, and I clung to him tightly, afraid for him to let go. I had never met anyone’s parents before, not anyone I cared about like I did Alex, and I was terrified they wouldn’t like me.

Alex nodded his head, and like magic, the stares turned into smiles and nods, and the conversation started around us like it had never stopped.

“We’ll go inside and I’ll introduce you to my immediate family,” he told me.

“Are all these people your relatives?” I whispered, as we went inside the house.

“Pretty much,” he nodded, “some are family friends. But when we say cousins, we could mean first or twenty-fifth. It’s all the same to us.”

“ Madre, Padre ,” Alex called, over the din of chatter in the house, “come meet my Seth.”

My Seth.

I didn’t think I’d ever been anyone’s mine before.

My cheeks flushed at his words, and warmth bloomed in my chest. Before I could dwell too much on my feelings, an older Hispanic couple stood in front of us, smiling warmly.

“Seth, this is my madre , Claudia,” he introduced his mom, but when he pronounced her name he said it like Cloudia instead of how Americans pronounced it. “And this is my padre , Eduardo.”

Claudia wrapped me in a hug, and I automatically hugged her back. When she pulled back, she studied my face, then said something to Alex in Spanish I didn’t understand. So, I just smiled, and told myself I needed to start having Alex teach me Spanish .

“Alejandro,” a quiet voice called, “Tráemelo.”

“My abuela wants me to bring you to her,” Alex whispered in my ear. “She doesn’t speak English very well. Just a few words, so I’ll translate for you.”

“What did your mom say to you?” I asked him, as he led me over to the flurry of

activity in the kitchen.

It smelled wonderful, and I was super hungry. Hopefully there were some dishes that weren't too spicy. Since I had gotten pregnant, my spice level was like a minus fifteen and it was annoying.

He grinned at me, "She said you have beautiful eyes."

"Abuela," Alex stopped in front of a tiny omega, who had to be at least eighty years old or even older. Her brown skin was lined with age, her hair white, and braided in one thick braid down her back. He must have introduced me, but the only word I understood was my name.

She stared at me intently, from the top of my head to my feet, taking me all in. I tried not to fidget and clung tightly to Alex's arm.

"Seth, this is my abuela, Isabella."

"It's so nice to meet you," I said, and listened as Alex translated. She nodded, then gave me a warm smile, so I smiled back, feeling a bit more at ease. Even if we didn't speak the same language, a smile was universal.

"And what about us?" The woman that had shouted for Alex asked from behind us, standing with her arms folded and looking all kinds of annoyed.

There were four more women with her, all wearing the same expressions. They each looked enough alike, and resembled Alex, I figured they had to be his older sisters.

Alex smirked, "I didn't want you scaring him off. I like this one."

They started speaking in Spanish to each other so quickly it almost made my head

spin, before they turned to stare at me.

“He’s very pretty,” one of the ones in the middle of the pack finally said, this time in English.

“His eyes are stunning,” another declared.

“He can hear you.” I gave them an amused smile but blushed a little at their flattery. Especially since I had foregone my usual make up and just styled my hair.

I had deliberately not shaved this morning, and dark stubble decorated the lower half of my face. Some people needed to ease into my fabulousness a bit at a time, but I always felt blah when my face was without at least eyeliner on.

“Oh, we know,” another one said with a smile, and I decided I liked them all.

Alex chuckled good naturedly and pulled me closer to him. I loved it when he did that. It made me feel...well, it made me feel all the things.

Subtly, so not to be obvious, I breathed in his scent, letting his musky earth smell wash over me. He kissed the top of my head, and I swear there was a collective sigh of “awe’s” from his sisters.

“Okay,” Alex pointed to the one on the left, “we have first born, Claudia.”

“Like your mom?” I questioned.

“Just like. It’s not uncommon in our culture for daughters to be named after their mothers,” he explained, “though many will go by their middle names.”

He gave his sister a pointed look. “Claudia just likes to be a rebel and refuses to do



so.”

“Tell me, Seth,” she turned her dark eyes to me, “do I look like a Miriam?”

“Uh, well, no?”

“Good answer,” she beamed at me. “He can stay.”

Alex snorted, “Next we have Carmen, the loudmouth that bellowed my name earlier.”

“It’s the only way to be heard over all of you,” she defended.

“Third born we have Araceli, followed by Veronica, and last, but not least, Elena.” Alex introduced them all, and I just hoped I would remember what name went with what face.

“There’s going to be a pop quiz later,” Veronica warned me, her brown eyes sparkling.

“Bring it on,” I sassed with more confidence than I felt. That was a flurry of names and they all looked so much alike it might take a minute to figure out who was who.

Alex glanced around, then called, “ Madre, Padre , bring abuela . We have some news.”

Standing close to Alex, as his immediate family, minus his brother-in-laws, and assorted nieces and nephews, gathered around us, staring intently, my stomach fluttered with nerves.

“What is it, Alejandro?” his mom looked worried, as she took a seat on the sofa next to Isabella. Eduardo sat next to his wife, holding her hand.

Alex looked at me, his gaze so warm, so dare I say loving , that I couldn't do anything but stare into his eyes.

Nothing else mattered but the two of us. The way he made me feel. I was aware we were living in a bubble full of fated mates pheromones, but I didn't care. I would gladly stay in this bubble forever, with Alex.

“Seth isn't just my boyfriend,” Alex told them. “He's—we're—fated, like you and Padre .” He directed that towards his mom.

There were collective gasps throughout the group, other than his dad, who was quietly translating to his grandmother.

“And,” Alex put his hand on my stomach and I saw every set of eyes follow the movement, “we're expecting a baby. At the end of July.”

The group exploded in a chorus of congratulations and hugs. Isabella, after understanding what was happening, stood in front of me. Grasping my cheeks in her hands, she stared at me for several seconds, before she patted my cheeks, giving me a warm smile and a nod of her head.

“We're so happy for you,” Mama Claudia, as I dubbed her in my head, dabbed at her eyes.

“So happy. When is the wedding? You are going to mate claim him, aren't you, Alejandro?”

There are so many things to plan! July will be here so soon!

” She lightly slapped his arm. “Why didn't you tell us sooner! So much to do.”

“ Madre , stop,” Alex chided, “we haven’t made any of those decisions yet. Seth is going to be moving in with me, but really, that’s as far as we’ve gotten. We hadn’t been dating long,” he urged me with his eyes to go along with his story, “when we found out we were expecting.”

Yeah, he was definitely fudging the timeline and truth, but I didn’t blame him one bit.

“We’re still in the getting to know you stage.”

“Bah,” she fussed at him, throwing her hands up. “You knew each other well enough to make a baby.”

My stomach growling saved us by the bell, and then I found myself fussed over more than I’d ever been fussed over in my life.

Before I could blink, I was sitting at one of the tables set up outside, next to a portable heater, with a plate piled high of all kinds of delicious smelling food.

Alex had overseen what his sisters put on my plate, so that nothing was too spicy, explaining that while I had loved spice before, the baby was not a fan. I was really hoping that changed before too long.

Finally, I had my fill, and leaned against Alex, rubbing my baby and food belly.

“I could seriously eat a pan of that rice, but I’m so full I can’t eat another bite. That was all so good.”

“That’s our madre’s cilantro lime rice,” Veronica, or maybe Elena, told me. “You think this is good, wait until you try our abuela’s tamales.” She made a gesture of a chef’s kiss. “So good, and no one in the family can make them as good as she does.”

Yawning, I self-consciously covered my mouth with my hand. “Sorry, it’s been a busy few days.”

“And you’re pregnant,” Claudia said, “that alone will exhaust you. Alex, take your man to bed. We’ll kick everyone out and clean up.” She winked at me. “I’ll make sure the leftover rice finds its way into the fridge for you.”

Alex pulled me to my feet, his arm around my shoulders.

“You just got moved up to favorite sister.” I winked at her.

“Wait, who was your favorite?” Araceli demanded to know, looking slightly put out.

“I’ll never tell,” I called, as Alex gently pulled me into the house, which was surprisingly quiet and void of people.

Stopping, I turned in his arms, looping my arms around his neck and pulled him down for a kiss. “I like your family. ”

He brushed my hair back from my forehead. “They like you too.”

“Will you teach me Spanish?”

“If you’d like.”

Another yawn escaped, and tiredness slammed into me like a Mack truck. “Alex?”

“Hmmm, carino ,” he murmured into my hair.

“Take me to bed.”

“Always, mi amor.”

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### Chapter Fifteen

Seth

May

Nibbling on the tender skin around my thumbnail, I stared at my phone in my hand, wondering how long I could wait to answer Alex's text before he sent out the National Guard.

Alex: How's it going?

Glancing around the empty boxes beside my couch, my brain tried to come up with how to respond. I'd been putting him off the last three weeks, and now my time was up.

Lying , my cougar reminded me, not at all sympathetic to my plight. You've been lying to him the last three weeks.

Not on purpose! I planned to pack.

My cat snorted.

I did! Then I got here, and there was so much to do, and I just...noped out and didn't do anything.

Not true. You binged a show and played games on your phone.

Well, when he put it that way it just sounded bad.

Me: Great! Almost done! On the last box now!

That was a lot of exclamation points. Had I oversold it?

Probably not, since I had been coming to my apartment every night for the last three weeks after work. Staying for three to four hours, before winding up at Alex's for the night completely exhausted.

All in preparation of moving day. Which was in two days. Two days!

Looking around my fully not-one-thing-packed apartment, I sighed.

This was bad. So, so bad.

Other than getting my lease sorted out with my apartment manager, I hadn't gotten much else done.

How was I going to explain to Alex that I was super organized at work, but when it came to stuff at home, especially something as large as this move was, I was hopelessly unorganized.

It was like my brain just clicked off each night I entered my apartment after work, ready to start packing, sorting, and tossing.

It all became so overwhelming, and I was exhausted most nights after working all day on top of it. I always arrived here with good intentions but then I would just sit on my sofa, looking around hopelessly with no clue where to actually begin. That amounted to nothing getting done.

Alex had taken tomorrow off with plans to move as many boxes as he could by himself, and Saturday a bunch of our friends were planning to be here around eight in the morning to help us move furniture and anything left.

Nothing was packed.

Nothing was sorted.

I hadn't decided what I was keeping, what I was donating, and what I was trashing.

Because I had been spending most nights with Alex since we had done the whole meet-the-parents stuff, the majority of my clothes and bathroom items had already found their way to Alex's house, so at least that part was finished.

Better start calling it your house too , my cat advised. You've been living there for months now, whether you admit it or not.

You are not being nearly as helpful as you think you are.

I'm aware.

Goddess, my cat was a straight up asshole sometimes.

Alex: What time will you be home?

Glancing at my phone I saw it was already half past seven. I'd been here nearly two hours already.

Me: Maybe another hour?

Alex: Okay, I'll see you at home. \*heart emoji\*



Me: See you at home.

My chest got all warm at the sight of the pink heart emoji, and my stomach fluttered.

Rubbing a hand across my round belly, I told the baby, “Your alpha daddy is a sap.”

But secretly, I loved that Alex always put heart emojis on his text messages.

“And when he sees this mess tomorrow, Seth, you can kiss it all good-bye,” I worried out loud.

“Sorry, peanut, I tried to get it together. I promise to be better when you get here. Okay, that’s probably a lie.

I mean, I’ll do my best to get it together, but you should lower your expectations now.

Be happy that one of your parents has their shit together and call it a win. ”

Looking around my small living area and kitchen, I was ashamed of everything that still needed to be done. I’d had good intentions to get it all done by now. Sadly, none of my intentions had manifested into reality .

Pushing myself off my couch, I grabbed a box and wandered over to the closed door of my second bedroom, determined that tonight would be the night I actually packed something.

Opening the door, I flipped on the light, then flipped it off just as fast. Well, the cleaning gremlins had not come in and taken care of this...situation.

Shoulders back, my hand crept to the light switch once more and flipped it up.

Boxes filled up almost every free space. If it wasn't for the path I had somehow carved out, you wouldn't even be able to get into the room. Unopened deliveries with an orange smiley logo glared accusingly at me.

"Don't judge me," I muttered, setting my empty box down, not sure what I was even going to do with it.

First, I needed to open all of these packages and see what was even in them. And therein lay the problem.

Every single time I planned to take care of this room, the task was so daunting that I just...didn't. I found something much more enjoyable to do, that didn't cause my brain to spin out of control.

No one knew about this room. Not even Bennett. It was embarrassing.

What could I even say to explain it? How did I even justify not even remembering what was in most of the boxes ?

Or that I had tried several times to come in here, to get it organized and cleaned out, and just been so overwhelmed by it that I hadn't done one single thing.

How did I explain that after being on top of things all day long at work, that when I got home, my brain just sorta...short circuited?

To the point that when I would go on a shopping spree, and all my packages showed up, I just couldn't even deal with opening them.

So into the spare room they went, never to be seen again.

Oh, if it was something I really needed, I opened it.

But most times it was books, or movies, or just random shit I ordered late at night because my brain said I needed it. Then it got here, I wasn't in whatever mood I'd been in before, and I just couldn't be bothered.

And now Alex was going to find out my dirty little secret.

He'd probably take one look at this room, the boxes piled high, plus all the other stuff I hadn't done to get ready for this move and he'd know I was way too much to deal with.

Accuse me of not wanting to live together, to be with him, and, well, it wasn't like I hadn't tried to warn him how I was.

Really he had only himself to blame.

Are you victim blaming? My cat sounded disgusted with me .

Excuse you, I'm the victim here. My alpha is gonna take one look at my hoarder ass and hightail it outta here.

Oh paleese! That man is so gone for you it's borderline disturbing.

Yeah well, he's gonna wonder what in the actual fuck I've been doing every night over here, and likely jump to some conclusion I've been fucking off with another alpha. His last boyfriend did that, you know?

His last boyfriend wasn't his fated mate or having his pup. You need to get a grip. You're spiraling and I don't have the energy for it.

Don't whine at me about having no energy, I'm the one—

My internal argument with my cat was cut off by a sharp rapping on my front door.

Eyes wide, I stared down the hallway, feeling like I was caught doing something I shouldn't be.

"For fucks sake, Seth," I ran a hand through my sweaty hair. Even with the A.C. cranked, I was burning up. "Get a grip."

Padding over to the door in my bare feet, because I had shed my scrubs as soon as I had come inside for something more comfortable, which had been what I could find in the last few items of clothing still here, I cracked the door and peered out.

Alex's brown eyes met mine, and he held up a brown bag of something that smelled amazing. "What are you doing here?"

"Feeding you," he told me, nudging the door further open and stepping around me. His amused gaze ran down my body, as I shut the door. "Nice outfit."

Looking down at myself, I flashed him a grin, then struck a pose. "It's all the rage in maternity wear."

The elastic of my scrubs had been digging into my belly all day, on top of Mother Nature deciding that rolling into Memorial Day weekend would be the perfect time to spike the temperatures with a heat wave.

I'd dug in what was left here of my clothes, finding a pair of black sequined booty shorts.

They were too tight across my ass, and I had the waistband pushed under my belly.

The hot pink crop top was stretched across the top of my belly, held together only by

some excellent stitching at the seams and a whole lotta prayers.

brAT was written in black swirly letters across my chest.

Alex snorted, “At least it’s accurate.”

He looked around, not saying a word, as he set the bag on the counter in the small kitchen. “I brought food.”

“I see that.” Moving around him, I reached into the cabinet for plates. “Why?”

He tilted his head as I pulled the drawer open for some silverware. My stomach, the traitor, took that moment to rumble angrily, reminding me that I had forgotten to stop for something to eat and my fridge was the one and only thing that was cleaned out .

Staying so much at Alex’s made that an easy task. My first night here “packing” I had chucked everything inside in the trash—it had expired anyway—and been done with the lot of it.

“That’s why.” He stopped my fidgeting with the dinnerware and pulled me into his arms. One large hand rubbed over my bare belly, and he bent his head and brushed a tender kiss across my lips.

My eyes closed and I let out a soft sigh of contentment.

“And because I could feel you were upset by something.”

Teeth scraping across my bottom lip, I wouldn’t meet his eyes. After a few seconds, he took my hand and led me to the sofa.

“Sit. I’ll get our plates and we can talk.”

Blowing out a breath, my stomach fluttered with nerves. This was it. This was the last meal we would have together.

After this, Alex would be gone.

I'd see him every other weekend, when we did parent drop-off, and maybe at school functions for our pup.

Alex sat two plates down on the coffee table, frowned at me, then went back to the kitchen.

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Opening the fridge, he closed it, digging in the cabinets until he found two glasses and filled them at the tap with water. “Seth, whatever is bothering you can’t be that bad. I can feel how tense you are, and it’s not good for you or the baby. ”

Alex kept saying he felt our bond getting stronger, but I was still riding the skeptical fence about mate bonds.

When he sat next to me on the sofa, his strong thigh brushing mine, some of my nerves eased. There was something about just being near Alex that always settled the chaos inside of me.

“Eat your lo mein,” he instructed, picking up his fork and taking a bite. His eyes took note of everything still not packed as we ate in silence for a few minutes. Finally, he put his fork down, took a drink, and said, “Talk to me.”

Fork poised to my mouth, I paused my inhaling of my food. I had been starving and hadn’t even realized it. “About what?”

“Do you not want to move in together?” he asked, his voice quiet. “If I pushed you into something you don’t want, I’m sorry. Things have been fast, but I thought we were on the same page and wanted the same thing.”

He glanced around my very not packed up space. “It seems I was wrong, and that’s okay. We just need to reevaluate and—”

“I want to live with you,” I interrupted him. “It’s not that I don’t want to. I do! When I come home to you, to your house, I can’t explain it. It feels like where I’m supposed

to be. This apartment is just a place, but your house is...home.”

Taking my hands in his, he turned and I found myself staring into his uncertain brown eyes. It was such a strange look to see on Alex, that it made me feel horrible. He was always so confident, so sure of himself, and I had put that look on his face.

“Then what’s going on, carino ? Because you’ve been coming here for days and from what I can see, nothing is packed.”

“I’m afraid if I tell you, you’re going to leave.” My voice was shaky as I whispered the words.

Honesty was the best policy, and I needed to trust Alex enough to be honest with him. He might as well know what he was getting into now.

He somewhat had an idea. He knew I was mouthy, and a brat, but this...this was a side of myself I had tried hard to keep from him. And I’d been doing a good job of it, until now.

“I’m not going to leave,” he assured me, his lips quirked beneath his mustache. “Unless you’re hiding a dead body in here, and then...well, I can’t say for sure. I am a lawyer, after all.”

Shaking my head, I smiled a half smile, “No. No dead bodies.”

“Okay,” Alex said matter-of-factly, “we have established that you still want to move in together. Do you want to tell me why you haven’t packed anything?”

My hands fluttered wildly, before I clenched them tightly together. “Promise you won’t be mad?”



“I won’t be mad. ”

“You say that now.”

“Seth.” He sighed, but there was no anger in his voice, just confusion.

“Here’s the thing, I’m super organized at work.

All day long, because I like things to run smoothly.

I like order. But when I get home, I’m...the opposite of that.

I step in the door and my brain just says no.

I see the things that need to be done, but I just can’t do them.

This feeling builds up inside me, and I get overwhelmed and anxious, so I just... don’t.”

Alex nodded his head in agreement, but how could he possibly understand what I was saying when I didn’t really understand it. All I knew was my brain worked differently than other people’s and it always caused issues.

“Why are you nodding like that?” I demanded, giving him the stink eye. He looked like a damn bobble head.

Alex arched one dark brow at me. “Do you think I don’t know that already?

Seth, we’ve practically been living together for months now.

Waiting for your lease to expire, and the random nights you decide you need to sleep

here just to, I don't know, make yourself feel like you can say we haven't officially moved in together doesn't change the fact that we have been sharing our lives, and space, for weeks now.

I know that as soon as you walk in the door, efficient Seth has left the building. ”

What was this man even saying to me? He knew? But I'd hidden it so well. At least I thought I had.

“Then who am I when I get home?” I stared at him, full of questions.

“You're my mate who leaves a trail through the house of everywhere he has been.

I'll never have to wonder where you are.

Your scrubs come off practically as soon as you shut the door.

Pants here, shirt there, a shoe over there.

Sock thrown here. Mail tossed...well, it's a different spot every day.

It's like a mail scavenger hunt nightly.

A bill here, a bill there. Never all together, which is kinda fun, honestly, to see if I can find it all. ”

“I...do?” Did I do that? Maybe I did.

“I just go behind you, picking things up. While I make dinner, you channel surf, mostly because you can't get settled on one show for more than five minutes, unless it's something you've seen a hundred times before.

New stuff needs to catch your attention quickly, or you're flipping to the next thing. ”

“New shows are boring.” I whined, because they were.

“Seth, I see you,” Alex brushed a lock of my hair from my forehead, his hand cupping my cheek. “I have seen you from the first second you strutted into that ballroom like you owned the place. I see all of you. Even the parts of you that you try to keep hidden from me.”

Because I was at a loss for words, or maybe too many were flying around my brain for me to put into sentences that made any kind of sense, I turned my face into his hand, nuzzling his palm with my nose .

Closing my eyes, I breathed him in. His familiar scent, that always made my soul settle. He smelled like an alpha, musky and dark, but most of all, he smelled like Alex.

Familiar. Comforting. Arousing. Mine.

This man continued to prove to me daily, not just with his words but with his actions, that he was mine.

That he was here.

That he wasn't going anywhere.

He saw me, the real me, and he was still here.

Best show him that room, before you get lost in all your feels , my cat reminded me.

My eyes flew open, and I jerked away from Alex.

“What is it?” He looked hurt by my sharp pulling away.

“Umm...hold that thought,” I winced, pushing myself out of the softness of the couch. Alex took my hand, helping pull me up.

“I need to show you something. It’s the main reason nothing has been done. Well, one of the reasons. I really did come here every night thinking that tonight would be the night I would get something done. And then I just—”

“Got overwhelmed and then didn’t do anything?” he filled in the blanks when I couldn’t finish my sentence.

“Yeah, that.”

Taking his hand, I slowly led him to the closed door of the second bedroom. “It’s not as bad as it looks.”

Nope, it was about ten times worse than it looked, but I was determined to try to put a positive spin on this .

“And I’m not a hoarder, I swear I’m not. I just sometimes get in moods to buy things. Things I’m sure I need, or want, at the time. And then I buy like all the things that go with it.”

His brow furrowed a little. “All the things that go with it?” he repeated slowly.

“Yeah, so say I find an author's book I like, then I buy all their books.”

“A lot of people do that.”

“Mmmm, yeah...ummm.”

Alex saved me from trying to explain what was waiting behind the closed door, reaching past me to turn the knob and flip the light on.

Staying behind him, nail of my pointer finger firmly in my mouth where I could gnaw on it, I waited for the explosion. That never came.

Instead, there was a deafening silence, as Alex took the tiniest step into the room. Not like he could take a big step, since there was literally no room to walk.

An explosion might have been better than the silence that went on for a full minute, then another.

Alex didn't move, just took his time looking from one end of the room to the other.

I didn't move. Fuck, I wasn't sure I was even breathing.

Finally, he turned around, his hand rubbing over his beard.

“Say something!”

I couldn't take it anymore.

“I know, it's bad! It's so bad. I don't even...

I don't...” I waved a hand at the mess behind him.

“I...I'm sorry! I'm sorry my brain is all haywire and doesn't work like most people's.

I'm a mess, okay! I tried to tell you! I just...

don't know where to start with it, and then I get so overwhelmed, that I dip out and

play a video game, or watch a movie I've seen a million times, or read, or anything but dealing with this.

It's how I am. It's how I've always been.

Ask my parents, they'll tell you. And it's not just this.

I'm like this with everything . I forget to pay my bills half the time.

I mean I do pay them, but only after reminders and late fees, which is stupid.

Adulting is just so...much some days. I just can't.

And you're so put together—you're a lawyer for fucks sake—I bet you never forget a bill.

Or get anxiety over some packages. Or just life.

I know I'm not what you wanted in a mate, let alone a fated one that you're stuck with.

You can still take the out clause," I reminded him, my hand coming to rest on my protruding belly, where the baby gave my palm a swift kick.

Alex cupped both of his hands around my cheeks, stopping my word vomit. My chest was heaving because I'd forgotten to take a breath through it all.

"Listen to me," his voice was soft but firm. "You are exactly who I want as my mate. If I have to spend the rest of my life telling you that, showing you that, I will. I knew from the very first when you helped yourself to my drink that you were going to be trouble."

I snorted, sniffing at the same time.

“You are the best kind of trouble, and I don’t want to use that stupid out clause, so please stop bringing it up.

I’m still here. I’m exactly where I want to be.

You are beautiful, and smart, and competent.

I don’t care if I have to pick up the trail of destruction you leave through the house.

I will do it with a smile until we’re eighty. Do you trust me?”

“What?” My voice wobbled at his question.

“Do you trust me?” he repeated, one thumb caressing my cheekbone.

“Yes.”

I didn’t even have to put any thought into the question.

The truth was I did trust Alex and had since the beginning.

He had always made me feel safe with him, which didn’t always happen with some alphas I had been with in the past, if I was honest with myself.

The trust I felt for him was a major part of the reason I had agreed to move in with him, when we barely knew each other.

He made me feel all kinds of things I had never felt before, but had always secretly dreamed about. An alpha who I felt safe with, safe to be myself with, my true self, all

of the parts of me, good and bad. Alex did that.

“This isn’t the end of the world.” He kissed me again, and I leaned into him, letting him hold me up. Because now that all of this stress I had been keeping inside was out in the open, my knees felt a little wobbly with relief.

“It’s not?”

“Nope,” he rubbed his hands together. “This is doable.”

“What exactly does that mean?” I gave him a dubious look. “Are we renting a dumpster and going to toss it all in the trash?”

That seemed like the easiest way to me.

Alex laughed at my suggestion, but I was one hundred percent serious.

“No. I’m going to spend tomorrow going through all this and sorting it.

After work, together, we’ll decide what you want to keep, donate, or toss.

Same with furniture and other household things.

Saturday, we’ll move everything. We already have the truck rented, plus with all our friends helping, we can get this done pretty fast.”

He made it sound so flipping easy.

“Why are you so calm about this?” I asked suspiciously.

Maybe this whole thing was a dream, and I was going to wake up on my couch,



covered in drool, still needing to confess to Alex that moving day was about to be a nightmare.

“Because getting upset doesn’t solve the problem.”

“You’re a strange alpha, Alex Ortega,” I muttered, picking up a padded envelope near me, and trying to figure out what might be in it. Book, definitely .

Tossing it back into the pile, I told him, “We can just donate my furniture, I guess. You already have a house full.”

“ Carino , you aren’t going to be my roommate, you’re not renting a room in my house.

” He flipped the light off and closed the door firmly on my mess.

“If you want to keep something, we will. This sofa is very comfortable. It would work great in the finished basement. I’ve been wanting to do something with that space and a rec room, or movie room, seems like a good idea.

Same with your bedroom furniture. Perfect for one of the guest rooms. If you want to keep it, we keep it. There is room for all your stuff.”

Tilting my chin up with his finger, he looked so lovingly at me that it got hard to breathe.

“There is room for you. And all your messes.”

### Chapter Sixteen

Seth

The smell of coffee tickled my senses, and I blinked my eyes open sluggishly.

Work had been brutal the day before, with all manners of last minute, emergency sick kiddos to be seen.

It didn't help that Monday was the Memorial Day holiday, and parents were trying to get the little ones seen before the office was closed for three days.

Not to mention, they didn't want to have to deal with a sick kid when they wanted to enjoy sleeping in and grilling out.

There had been no way I could even sneak out an hour early, especially since we still hadn't hired an additional nurse.

Bennett had been busy interviewing people, but he kept saying while qualified they were missing something.

Then he'd slyly added he was working on someone from the hospital and hoping to convince them to take the position.

After work, I arrived at my apartment to find my kitchen counter filled with the contents of my cabinets, all organized neatly into different piles.

The spare bedroom had truly been a sight I had marveled at, wide-eyed. Every package had been opened, the contents in stacks on the floor. Books, movies, kitchen gadgets, clothes, and then what Alex had dubbed, “Weird, random shit that I have no idea what it is.”

Some of the items had been gifts intended for my family for birthdays and holidays that had never made it that far.

I was amazed at the progress Alex had made.

He’d even already boxed some items up, like my knick knacks I kept on shelves on my bookcases.

I liked traveling, and always picked up a trinket here or there to remember the trip by.

The boxes were stacked in a corner, neatly marked in black marker what the contents were.

Alex had promptly handed me three sheets of circle stickers.

“Pink is keep, blue is donate, and red is trash,” he instructed me. “You start sticking those on, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

The speed with which he had solved what I had worked up in my mind as an insurmountable problem had amazed me. The way he just understood how my brain worked, had me stopping a few times to pinch myself. Just to make sure I wasn’t actually dreaming.

Goddess knew, he had stuck around longer than anyone I had ever dated before. But there had been a small part of me that had been waiting for the other shoe to drop. The thing that would send him out the door, with the often-heard phrase, “You’re just

too much.”

But he hadn’t. He hadn’t yelled or berated me and said anything mean. He’d just accepted me, assured me he wasn’t going anywhere, and that was that.

The man was brilliant, and I had told him so with a quick blow job right in the middle of the mounds of junk. Then I’d hurried to stick the colored stickers on all the stuff. Instead of overthinking each decision, I went with my first instinct and got through the different piles rather quickly.

While I went about with my stickers, Alex ordered pizza and we ate it snuggled on the sofa, which had a pink sticker on one arm. We’d arrived home late, and had fallen into bed, both of us exhausted. Even now, I felt like I could sleep for another few hours.

Alex appeared in the doorway of the bedroom, balancing a mug of steaming coffee in each hand.

Sitting up in the king-size bed, I rubbed my hands through my sleep mussed hair, drinking in the sight of my alpha.

After our talk on Thursday, and my mini-freak out, a calmness that I had been missing settled over me .

For the first time, I truly believed that Alex was meant to be mine. That we somehow fit together, my jagged pieces aligning perfectly with his. For the first time, I believed the Goddess had gotten it right, that she did know what she was doing.

Yes, things had happened super quick for us, and yes it was basically like those insta-love books that Bennett loved, and I rolled my eyes at, but it felt true.

This was where I was meant to be. Alex was the alpha my soul had been searching for and waiting for all these years.

Carefully, Alex made his way over to my side of the bed, which gave me plenty of time to drink in the long, tightly muscled limbs covered in tanned skin.

His dark locks were loose and swayed over his shoulders with each step he took.

The loose white pajama pants he wore were bright against his skin, clinging to the bulge of his cock in the most delicious way.

My cougar purred beneath my skin, and my own cock woke up beneath the bunched sheets.

We had been so busy the past couple of weeks, other than the blow job last night, we hadn't had time for much else.

Pregnancy zapped my strength, and I usually ended up falling asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

Hopefully all that would change once we got the move behind us .

Alex carefully sat the mug down on the night table next to me, brushing his lips lightly over mine, before pulling back.

“Don't look at me like that. We have too much to do today, and too many people getting ready to descend on us.”

Batting my eyes in a perfected slow blink, I asked, “Like what?”

Knowing full well that I was looking at him like a cat with a bowl of cream.

It wasn't my fault he looked delicious in the mornings, his hair sleep-tousled, his chest bare, and those sleep pants clinging in just the right places.

This pregnancy might be exhausting, but I had also hit the I'm-exhausted-but-horny-as-fuck stage.

Alex pointed his finger at me when my tongue darted out to chase the kiss on my lips, doing a slow slide across my bottom lip.

"Like that! Don't do that. And don't give me your puppy dog eyes either. Don't bat those lashes at me and blink those blue eyes like you're Mr. Innocent. We do not have the time. Brat."

Pouting, I reached for the mug of coffee, taking in a long sniff of the brew. The day my stomach had finally stopped turning itself inside out over the smell had been a glorious one. Still, I was only allowed one cup of caffeine a day, so I tried to enjoy it to the fullest.

Swallowing the luscious sip of dark roast, I asked, "What time is it?"

Alex glanced at the clock, sitting down on the edge of the bed, his hip bumping my thigh. "It's almost nine."

"What?!" I gulped down half my cup in one swallow. "We told everyone eight!"

Alex wasn't dressed, I was barely awake, and he was acting as cool as a cucumber about it all.

Wrinkling my nose at him, I questioned, "Where is everyone? Oh Goddess! They're not coming are they? They all cancelled. They found out I've done nothing beyond putting some stickers on shit, that there are boxes to still pack and nothing got moved

yesterday, and they were like nope.”

Alex’s lips twitched, the small action nearly obscured by his beard and mustache.

“Do you really think our friends would do that?”

“I might, not gonna lie, if I was them. Though Bennett will at least show up, he’s used to sorting out my messes. He knows what he’s walking into. The rest of them? Not so much.”

Sometimes, and I would never admit this to anyone, I felt like I was a part of the group of omegas only because Bennett was their friend, and we were pretty much a package deal.

“I knew last night you needed some extra sleep, so I asked everyone to start at the apartment without us,” Alex explained. “Bennett told me he has a key, so it only took a few texts and he had everything handled for me.”

“That was really sweet of you,” I whispered, staring down into the dregs of my mug, because sometimes the things Alex made me feel overwhelmed me with too many feelings, especially lately. “I feel bad we aren’t there helping yet, though. I am the one moving.”

“And everyone knows you’re pregnant,” he countered. “We should probably get up and at it soon though. There are breakfast sandwiches in the kitchen for us, and I made a bunch to take to the apartment for people. We’ll ply them with pizza and beer later.”

“Please tell me there is bacon,” I moaned, feeling my stomach rumble with hunger. With my morning sickness passing, this baby always seemed hungry, especially in the mornings. It was like he or she had to make up for all the mornings I spent puking in the bathroom.

Alex stood, tossing me an indignant look, while holding his hand out to help me out of bed. He caressed the bump lovingly, before bending to place a sweet kiss on the tight skin, just above my belly button. “Of course there is. I know what my baby likes.”

“And your mate,” I chuckled, because bacon.

“I was talking about you.” He gave me a saucy wink. “There’s also sausage and ham.”

“Mmmm,” I hummed happily, as he tugged me into the bathroom behind him and started the water in the shower .

Holding me in a loose embrace, he brushed a lock of my hair out of my eyes, giving me a tender look. “I’m glad you’re officially moving in today, Seth.”

“Me too,” I told him honestly. “Even though we both know it’s just a formality. How much time do we have, do you think, before we need to be there?”

Alex gave me a wicked smile. “We have a few minutes.”

“Good.” Grasping his cock in my hand, I gave it a few good tugs, loving the weight of it in my hands. Alex’s breathing sped up, and small gasps of pleasure escaped his mouth as I stroked him.

Turning in his arms, I braced my arms against the shower wall, the water bouncing off my back. Sticking my ass out, I gave it a little wiggle. “It’s been much too long, Mr. Ortega.”

Sliding his slick body along my back, I shivered as his hard cock nudged between my cheeks. “Mmm, it has.”



Kisses brushed across my shoulders and neck, before his lips latched on just above my mating gland. He sucked tender skin between his lips, before scraping his teeth along the skin.

“Alex,” I moaned, pushing back against his hips, “while I usually adore foreplay, I’m going to need you to fuck me hard and fast. Like now.”

His hand smacked my wet ass cheek, and this time it was me that moaned, loud and long. “Bossy brat. ”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

I moaned again, when he parted my cheeks and the head of his cock breached my slick hole. He held my hips roughly as he pulled me back onto his thick length, spreading and filling me.

“Fuck, yes!” I hissed, the slight burn amping up my desire.

“Hold on, love,” he commanded, and I braced my palms against the slick tiles.

Hot water cascaded over us, the air turning humid around us.

Alex held me by my hips, slamming me onto his cock again and again, hard and fast like I had demanded.

I was helpless to do anything beyond pant, keen, and wail, as my orgasm rushed over me.

He followed behind me a second later, holding me tightly against his rigid body, as his cock swelled inside me and I felt the hot rush of his cum filling me up.

He pulled out way too soon, before his knot could bind us together.

While I knew he had done it because we had people waiting on us, my hole ached at the emptiness.

His body was still wrapped around mine though, and my head fell back against his shoulder as we both worked to steady our breathing. His hands roamed over my belly, soothing. We both laughed softly when the baby kicked at his hand, likely woken up

by our morning antics.

“Welcome home, Seth,” Alex whispered in my ear.

I smiled softly. Home.

“What in the ever-loving fuck is that?” I demanded, hands on my hips as I stared out the kitchen window into the backyard.

When we arrived at my apartment, Bennett had the moving party well in hand.

Within a few hours, everything had been loaded onto the moving truck, and even the stuff to be donated or tossed had been taken care of.

Now we were all back at Alex’s house—our house—everything unloaded and waiting to be unpacked.

“What’s happening out there?” Wade Sinclair demanded, coming up on my side to see what I was looking at.

“I do like to see a bunch of alphas doing our bidding,” Quinn Sinclair commented, flanking my other side.

Bennett took a spot next to Wade, all of us peeking outside at the activity going on .

“What are Alex and Asher whispering about?” Bennett wondered aloud, taking my attention from the two Sinclair alphas that were unboxing some kind of contraption in the yard.

So far they had unboxed several metal poles that were going to be...I had no clue what-so-fucking-ever.

Sure enough though, my mate and my boss had their heads together, both of them with their cell phones out, clearly up to something. As we watched, Alex called to Finn, and then the three of them were huddled together, heads shaking, and whispering conspiratorially.

“I’m afraid to ask,” I muttered, “but nothing good, I’m sure.”

Pointing at Quinn’s husband, Lachlan, joined his two brothers in whatever fuckery they were up to, I repeated. “What the fuck is that?”

Wade pushed up further on his tip toes so he could get a better look. After a moment, he declared, “Swing set.”

“Swing set?” I squeaked. “Not happening.”

Bennett shrugged, “Never too early, I guess.”

“The fuck it’s not.” I huffed. “Those things are nothing but stitches and broken bones. Ask me how I know.”

Quinn snickered, “Look, it’s got a baby swing. Rory and Patrick loved their baby swing.”

Rubbing a hand over my belly, I stared, horrified at the thought of putting my baby in that piece of plastic with leg holes. “They won’t even be able to hold their head up. ”

“But by next spring they will, and they’ll love it,” Gabe Carmichael, Asher’s alpha mate, sat down the two boxes he’d been carrying. I guess when you’re a Kodiak bear shifter carrying two boxes was nothing.

“Well, you might want to get out there and help them,” Quinn turned to look at our

hulking friend over his shoulder.

“Lachlan can’t be trusted with directions like that.

Seth is already freaked out by the swing set, as it is.

We don’t want him worrying that the swing is going to come crashing to the ground with his child in it. ”

Looking at all our horrified expressions, he tacked on, “Ask me how I know. Thankfully, I still had a hold of Patrick when it started to come down and no one was hurt.”

“Realllyyy?” Wade drew the word out with many syllables and skepticism.

“Let me clarify; my child wasn’t hurt. Let’s just say I will forever have something to hold over Lach’s head until we die.”

“Jamie seems like he would be able to put it together though,” Wade observed. “I’d put my money on him over Brendan any day.”

“Anyone want to bet on which Sinclair brother can put a swing set together properly?” Quinn seemed ready to take our money.

“Not helping,” I muttered, eyes darting between the serious discussion that was going on over the swing set instructions, complete with a ton of pointing and shaking heads, and whatever fuckery was going on between my mate, boss, and doctor. Nothing good from either side, I was sure.

“It’s fine,” Bennett pointed. “Gabe will save the day. If the man can build a house and fix almost anything, surely he can put a swing set together without harm to a

child.”

“Where’s Wyatt?” I asked, looking around at all the people filling our yard and house. “He’s a fucking genius. I would trust him putting it together.”

“He and Ryan ran to get the beer and pizzas,” Bennett told me. “I think they plan to all take advantage of no little ones for the day.”

My stomach rumbled, and I sighed happily. “Pizza. Yes, please.”

Wade snorted, wondering out loud, “How many alphas does it take to put one swing set together.”

“Seems like five,” Quinn counted out loud. “Lachlan, Jamie, Brendan, Becks, and Gabe.”

“Oh, now there are six,” Bennett said. “Shay’s joined in. I feel like between Shay and Gabe, it will be fine.”

“At least Alex is staying out of it, but seriously, I don’t know how I feel about whatever nonsense those three are up to.”

“They’re up to something for sure,” Bennett crossed his arms over his chest, staring at our boss .

“Yep, something shady is happening over there,” Wade agreed, “sus AF. I’ll try to get it out of Finn later. I have my ways to make that man talk.”

As we watched, the three men finally seemed to be done doing whatever they were doing, all grinning broadly at each other and putting their phones away. Definitely up to no good.

“Please, for the love of every Goddess out there,” I whispered to my friends, “do not, and I can’t repeat this enough, do not let them be planning a surprise baby shower. Just...no.”

“Don’t be silly,” Bennett scoffed, “I’ll be the one planning the baby shower, thank you very much. And unlike mine,” he gave me and Wade a pointed look, “this won’t be a surprise.”

Grinning broadly, I snarked, “You were soooo not happy when you walked into that.”

“He really wasn’t,” Wade laughed. “But he got over it. And so will you.”

Pointing my finger at him, I warned, “Don’t. I want to know when my shower is so I can look cute and fabulous.”

“That’s fair,” they all agreed.

We all turned as the front door opened and my mom called out, “Knock knock!”

Behind her trailed my entire family. My dad, my siblings and their mates. Regina’s belly was as round as mine, her dark hair in lovely braids all over her head .

Dad was looking around the living room with shrewd eyes, before he headed down the hallway to...do who the fuck knew what.

“Mom, Dad,” my voice rose so he could hear me wherever he had wandered off to. “What are you doing here?”

Mom looked confused by my question, before she marched into the kitchen and started unloading the large, reusable grocery bag she had with her.

“It’s moving day, isn’t it?” Was it my imagination or did she sound a tiny bit annoyed with me?

“I made you and Alex a bunch of freezer meals. The instructions are on them all, so you have some quick, healthy meals and don’t need to worry about cooking while you’re unpacking and getting settled.

Moving is so tiring, especially in your condition. ”

Kyle snorted, “We all know Seth doesn’t cook, Mom.”

“Alex cooks so I don’t need to.” I stuck my tongue out at Kyle, who just grinned and flipped me off.

Since my mom was busy loading up the freezer and couldn’t see us, I took the opportunity to flip the bird back at my brother. At the precise time that Alex’s family filled the doorway.

As soon as I saw the tiny, stout form of his grandmother, my hand flew down and I could feel my face heat up, hoping she hadn’t seen my wayward middle finger. She cackled, her brown eyes full of merriment, as she bustled into the kitchen with my mom.

Putting a bag on the counter, she pointed. “Tamales. Not spicy.”

Then she rattled off something in quick Spanish that I had no hope of even trying to follow.

“Let me just grab Alex,” I told the room, grabbing a package of tamales from the bag and quickly escaping to the backyard. Unwrapping the husk enough that I could take a bite, my eyes rolled back in my head at the delicious chicken and some mild spices



mixed with the masa.

Alex came over, grinning broadly. “Where did you get that?”

Holding my bag behind my back, I swallowed. “Our families are here. Both of them. All of them. All. Of. Them. Your abuela brought me tamales.”

“Just for you?” He raised a brow, clearly suspicious of me and my tamales.

Nodding, I took another quick bite. “She very clearly, in English, said no spice. Meaning she made them just for me. She loves me.”

He laughed. “She does. Your family is here too?”

“Yeah. Your mom, dad, and a shit ton of other people I can’t remember the names of.

Like at least half of your cousins, maybe more.

And my mom is loading our freezer up with meals.

I’m not sure why, just being a mom, I guess.

Dad is checking every room for who the fuck knows what, and Kyle is being a smartass dick.

I don’t know what Gilly is doing, but Regina is here so that’s all I care about. ”

“Just for that I’m taking these,” Kyle rushed up behind me and swiped my bag of tamales from my hands.

“Give that back!” I growled, because honestly, my brother had two kids and should

know better than to take food from a pregnant omega. He was just living on the edge of danger now.

Alex held up his hands. “If I know my abuela , there are plenty of tamales for everyone. Besides, pizza and beer will be here any minute. Ah, thanks for coming.”

Kyle snickered, “I like that you almost made that sound like a question. We would have been here sooner to help move, but we had some customers to take care of. Bunch of people having bbq’s and wanting to make sure their lawns are in top shape.

” Glancing around, he surveyed the backyard with a practiced eye. “Who does your lawn, Alex?”

“Uh,” Alex swiped his hands down his thighs, “I do. When I have the time. It’s not my favorite thing to do, and if I have a heavy caseload during the week, I put it off.”

Kyle nodded knowingly, like this wasn’t the first time he had heard something similar from a client. “We’ll add you to our weekly rotation.”

“Oh, ah, that would actually be great,” Alex told him.

“Kyle– ”

“You’re family, Seth,” my brother gave me a wink. “Even if you’re not part of the business, you still can get something from it. I always thought you were super brave by going to college and doing your own thing.” Kyle blushed, ducking his head. “I should have probably told you that sooner.”

Blinking, I blindly felt Alex take hold of my hand and squeeze it. Before my brain could sort out any kind of response, someone from inside the house yelled, “Pizza’s here!” and the moment was broken.

“I’m starving!” Kyle exclaimed, rushing back into the house, followed by all our friends who had been “helping” set up the swing set that my alpha had apparently bought without telling me. We’d be having a conversation about that later.

“He’s starving and he hasn’t done anything but low key diss our yard,” I muttered, as Alex’s arms pulled me close to his chest. “And steal my tamales.”

“Hey, I think I got free lawn care out of that, so feeding him is a small price to pay.” Alex smiled, but he was being serious. “Besides, the yard is always kind of a mess. And I will pay them. I’ll just be glad not to have to worry about it anymore.”

“Did he also give me a compliment?” I wondered skeptically, sure I had misheard my brother. “Or am I in some kind of weird, parallel universe? ”

“Nope, that happened too,” he verified. “Now, let’s go introduce our families to each other, and get some food. Then you and your friends can start unpacking boxes, while the rest of us alpha types get the furniture moved where you want it. And get the swing set put together.”

He steered me towards the house, and I looked back at the pile of random metal and plastic that was going to be a playset.

“Don’t think we won’t be talking about that danger trap you’ve purchased for our child,” I muttered, “because we will.”

Alex smacked his lips against mine, then brought my hand up and took a big bite of what was left of my tamale.

“Yes, mate. You can chastise me all you want later. In bed. Naked.”

“I like the sound of that.”

“Me too.”

### Chapter Seventeen

Seth

“That’s mine, thanks!”

Jacqueleen, our newest hire, snatched the file from my hand before I had a chance to even get to the door and call my patient back.

Blinking at the back of her teal covered scrubs, I huffed, “Excuse you, what?”

Her hand poised on the knob, she threw a secretive smile at me over her shoulder.

Since she had previously worked at the hospital for years, before Bennett had magically enticed her to fill our open position last month, I had known Jac for years. And I liked her, a lot. She had a thick Boston accent and a wicked sense of humor.

But today I wasn’t feeling the love .

“Go see Bennett,” she instructed me, then when I just stood there, hands planted on my hips, she waved her hand and the file at me. “Shoo.”

“You shoo,” I nearly growled, one hand pressing into my lower back and sticking my extremely round baby belly her way. “What is even happening right now?”

Her blue eyes softened. “Go see the boss. Seth, it’s okay, I promise. I’ve got this.”

Turning on my heel, then catching myself with one hand on the wall because my center of gravity had vanished last month, I grumbled, “Bennett isn’t the boss.”

Jac snorted. “That’s wicked funny. We both know who runs this joint and it ain’t Asher or Jax.”

Jax was our other pediatrician in the practice and Jacqueline handled her patients, while I handled Asher’s. We were still trying to find another nurse that could float between the two doctors when we had days off or were just overloaded with patients.

Bennett was desperately trying to fill the position before I went on maternity leave next month. If I had my way I’d work up until the time I went into labor, but no one else seemed on board with my plan.

Noticing Asher was still seated behind his desk on my way to Bennett’s office, I pointed a finger at him. “What do you know?”

My boss looked up from the chart he was reading with wide brown eyes. “About? ”

Shaking my head, I leaned against the doorframe, one hand resting on the top of my bump. The pup was kicking up a storm this morning, and I soothed a circle over the spot they were kicking the hardest.

“Don’t play innocent with me Asher Pierce.

I know when you’re guilty and you look guilty AF right now.

Why is Jac stealing my files for your patients and telling me to go see the boss.

” I used air quotes around the last part, then arched a brow at him.

“We both know that’s not you, but you know something. ”

Asher straightened in his chair, running a hand through his blond hair. “I know nothing.”

“Bullshit.”

We stared at each other, neither blinking, before he broke. Just like I knew he would.

Throwing his hands in the air, he slumped in his chair. “I can’t tell you. I’m sworn to secrecy. It’s a surprise.”

“I hate surprises.” Grumbling, I gave him what I hoped was a menacing look.

“Do I have to remind you again about the surprise baby shower you threw me?” Bennett had slinked silently from his office to come up behind me. “That so wasn’t cool.”

Turning to face him, I gasped. “OMG, let it go! Your baby shower was fantastic! And I only like surprises when I’m not on the receiving end of them. What is going on?”

“You don’t have any patients today,” Bennett told me softly .

My head spun from Bennett to Asher and back to Bennett. Hot tears suddenly burned my eyes, and I blinked furiously. If they made my eyeliner smear I was going to be hella pissed.

Seeing my face, Bennett put his arm around my shoulders and pulled me in for a quick hug. “I promise, it’s nothing bad.”

“I’m not starting my maternity leave early!” I declared, dabbing at my eyes, then

glared at Asher. “And you can’t fire me! I’m the best nurse you’ve ever had. All the patients and parents love me. And no one else would put up with you!”

“What did I do?” He exclaimed in confusion then glared at Bennett. “I told you doing it this way was a bad idea! And why on earth would you think you were being fired, Seth?”

“I don’t know!” I wailed. “Everyone is acting weird! No one will tell me what’s happening! I hate surprises!” I repeated, stamping my foot. “Someone tell me what’s going on! Right. This. Minute!”

Bennett took my shoulders and gently turned me, and I came face to face with Alex. He was leaning casually against the far wall, his lips pursed together in a smile, his eyes full of amusement at my slightly dramatic temper tantrum.

Pushing off the wall, he shook his head. “Qué temperamento, qué temperamento .”

“What’s going on?” I ignored him commenting on my temper, because even I could take an educated guess at that translation. “Why are you here?”

“I’m taking you away for a long, romantic weekend.”

He wrapped his arms loosely around me, his hands resting on my lower back just above the curve of my ass. My belly bumped his and the baby chose that moment to give another swift kick.

Alex’s eyes widened as he felt the little foot. Gently, he caressed the spot on my belly and the baby settled down instantly, like they knew their alpha daddy was there.

“You are?” I whispered, still not sure what was happening, or why he was here when he should be at his office. I knew he usually had court on Fridays. But he really was



here, dressed casually in jeans and a white polo that looked oh so good on him.

“Sí, carino.”

Gah, I loved when the man spoke Spanish to me, even if most times I had no idea what he was saying. Didn't matter what words were. The way the language rolled off his tongue, his deep voice lowered to almost a whisper meant just for my ears, always made me practically melt into a puddle of goo.

“But—”

He shook his head, the long strands brushing over his shoulders. “No buts. Our bags are packed and in the car. Since we aren't ready to have a honeymoon yet, I thought we could have a baby moon.”

Brows scrunched together, I gave him a what-the-fuck look. “A what now?”

Bennett groaned behind me, and when I glanced at him, I saw him palming his face.

“A baby moon. A pregnant couple goes away on a romantic getaway before the baby is born. Like a last hurrah before your life is filled with midnight feedings, dirty diapers, and more laundry than you ever thought one tiny person could produce. So much laundry,” he whispered.

“Sounds made up.” I was still skeptical.

Alex planted a quick kiss on my lips. “So suspicious. I wanted for us to have a decadent week away in Turks and Caicos, but Finn and Naomi said that was a no go. Apparently, you are way too pregnant to fly. So, we put our heads together and I came up with the perfect weekend away. Doctor,” he tossed a look over my head at Asher, “and boss approved.”

Wrinkling my nose, I questioned suspiciously, “Is this what you guys were up to when we were moving?”

Alex grinned, “Yes, and don’t think we didn’t see all of you watching us from the window. Because we did.”

Shrugging nonchalantly, I informed him pertly, “We weren’t hiding. Just enjoying the view of manly alphas doing physical labor. ”

“Mmmhmmm,” he purred in my ear, making me shiver, even though my body went hot all over. “Now, quit complaining and get your delectable ass in the car.”

“But I need clothes,” I whined, as he turned me in his arms and started marching me down the hallway, towards the rear entrance for employees only. “And my make-up, hair products. I need to know where we are going so I know what to pack.”

The man had lost his mind if he thought he was going to kidnap me for a weekend and not even tell me what we were doing or where we were going. An omega needed to know these things. If I didn’t know I was liable to pack my entire closet just to make sure I had plenty of options.

“I packed for us after you left this morning,” Alex ushered me out the door to the parking lot, where his car was waiting in a spot close to the entrance. “Don’t worry, I packed all the essentials you’ll need.”

He opened the passenger door, then helped me get my pregnant self settled in the seat, no small feat the past month.

I wasn’t carrying low, but I was carrying straight out, and I was as round as a huge bouncy ball. One of those gigantic ones they had at Walmart. I hadn’t seen my feet in months. Alex clicked the seatbelt around me while I sputtered. Fluttering my hands, I

frowned at him.

“Essential? We both know that word means entirely different things to the both of us.”

“ Mi amor ,” Alex cupped my cheek gently, “trust me. I have you covered. Now, relax. Take a nap. We’ll be on the road for a few hours.”

“But—” I still wasn’t sold, and I didn’t like this. I never did well with surprises. I needed to know all the things.

“Trust me,” Alex repeated, closing my door and hurrying over to the driver's side.

I took a quick second to glance in the back seat, but didn’t see any of our bags. Which meant they had to be in the trunk and I wasn’t going to be able to casually get a sneak peek to make sure he hadn’t forgotten to pack something I couldn’t live without.

“My pillow!” I exclaimed, as he turned the key and the car hummed sexily beneath us. The last few weeks I couldn’t sleep unless I had my pregnancy body pillow. Bennett had sworn by his, and we’d gone shopping for one for me when I had complained that getting comfortable was impossible.

Alex expertly backed out of the spot, then took my hand in his and brought it up to his lips.

Placing a soft kiss on my palm, he gave me an amused look.

“It’s in the trunk. Now relax, please. Put the seat back, close your eyes, and rest. Soon enough, our sweet little one will be here and there won’t be any rest for either of us.”

Sighing loudly, I reluctantly did what he said, and reclined the seat. Wiggling into the

soft leather until I was as comfortable as I was going to get, I shut my eyes .

Alex's free hand came to rest gently over my baby bump, and the gesture instantly had the tension in my shoulders loosening.

Soon the lull of the car, the easy listening station Alex turned on, and the warmth of his hand on my belly had me drifting off.

But not before I whispered, "I do trust you."

### Chapter Eighteen

Alex

Watching Seth sleep had become one of my favorite pastimes. It wasn't often that he was just...still. His face relaxed, free of all the things that raced through his head, every day, every minute, at lightning speed.

I hated to wake him now, but we had reached our destination, and the valet was waiting to park the car, while the hotel staff was waiting to collect our bags.

Brushing a dark lock of hair off his brow, I whispered, “ Carino, time to wake up. We’re here.”

Seth groaned, his lashes fluttering open, his blue eyes looking dazed for a few seconds. “We’re here?”

He blinked a few times, then looked around before spinning his head back to me. “Alex, this is the hotel where we met. ”

Grinning, I exited the car, popping the trunk so our bags could be taken up to our room.

“The pillow too, please,” I instructed the uniformed beta, before I opened Seth’s car door and helped him out. He groaned again, his hands pushing at his lower back.

“Okay?” Every time he groaned, I swore my heart sped up with anxiety.

Realistically, I knew that pregnancy came with aches and pains that had nothing to do with labor. He was growing a tiny human inside him, which was amazing. But I never wanted him to hurt even a tiny bit and wanted to do anything in my power to make him comfortable.

He nodded, still staring at the front of the hotel like he'd never been here before. "Just my back from the car ride. Nothing new."

Well, that was something I could do something about and planned to this weekend.

The next few days were all about pampering my omega to the fullest. Seeing that our luggage had been collected, and the valet was parking my car, I took his hand and tugged him into the cool air of the hotel lobby.

"Alex," he hissed, grabbing onto my wrist, "I'm still wearing my scrubs."

Giving his pink scrubs covered in Disney cats a quick look, I told him, "And they are adorable. Have I told you how gorgeous you look in pink? "

"You're impossible," he grumbled, but he couldn't keep the smile from his words.

Stopping at the front desk to check in, the omega behind the counter preened. "Ah yes, Mr. Ortega, the honeymoon suite is ready for you. We're pleased to have you back with us."

In reality, the only time I had ever stayed here was New Year's Eve, but I had already sunk a boatload of my money into renting the penthouse honeymoon suite for the next few days.

I'd even paid for the room a day earlier than we arrived, so that the room would be already cleaned and waiting for us, knowing we would arrive well before normal

check-in this morning. I didn't mind because Seth was worth every single penny.

"Thank you," I took the two key cards he handed me with a smile. "My mate and I actually met here, and as you can see, we are enjoying some couples time before our pup arrives."

The omega gave Seth's scrubs and belly a once over, before smiling politely.

"Congratulations to you both. We do hope you'll enjoy your stay. Here's an itinerary of the spa treatments you've booked, and also a listing of local restaurants and attractions you might like. Please let us know if we can be of any assistance with your needs. "

"Spa treatments? Honeymoon suite?" Seth whispered, still clinging tightly to my arm.

"Alex, what have you done?"

"Just pampering my omega before he gives birth." Steering him towards the row of shiny elevators, I swear I heard the omega at the front desk sigh wistfully. "Our bags have already been taken up to the suite."

While we rode the elevator up to the top floor, I explained to him what I had planned for the weekend.

"I thought we could order some lunch from room service, and then we have a mani/pedi scheduled for you in a couple of hours, followed by a couples massage. Prenatal for you. Don't worry, I spoke with Naomi and Finn and they said it was okay.

I thought we could just relax in the suite the rest of the night, order a nice dinner from room service.

Tomorrow we can hang by the pool, or do some shopping if you'd like, and if you are up for it there's a salsa club I like here, and I thought we could go dancing. "

Seth's dark brows rose straight up to his hairline.

"You want to take me salsa dancing? Alex, you know I don't know how to salsa.

The first time I ever did it was with you, and I had no clue what I was doing.

" He looked down at his belly, "And I'm huge and off balance.

I think my clubbing days are on hold for a few months, at the very least."

"One of these days we are going dancing," I declared, and he gave me an indulgent smile .

The elevator dinged, signaling we had arrived on our floor, and opened to reveal a small foyer with ornate double doors in front of us. Inserting the keycard, I opened the doors for us and watched as Seth gawked, wide-eyed. Moving into the living room of the suite, he did a slow circle.

There was a stone fireplace that I doubted we would use since it was June, but the aesthetic was lovely. A soft looking L shaped sectional looked inviting, along with a full-size kitchen, which I had no intention of us using.

Taking him by the hand, I led him to the French doors that opened to our private balcony. A bistro table and chairs were set up there, surrounded by pots of colorful flowers.

"I want to show you the best part."



Seth had noticed the set of stairs on the balcony and gave me a questioning look. He still hadn't said one word, and I was a bit worried about that, since Seth wasn't prone to silence. But I just surged ahead anyway.

"You first," I told him, indicating with a tilt of my head for him to take the stairs. "They are a bit steep and I want to be behind you in case you lose your balance."

He snorted at that, muttering that if he did fall he would flatten me with his bulk, but he slowly started up the stairs. My eyes couldn't help but be glued to his luscious ass, swaying gently as he walked, the pink scrub pants stretched tight .

He had it in his head that he was much larger than he actually was. His belly might be huge in his eyes, but the rest of him wasn't. He had gained a bit of weight in his ass, but I certainly wasn't complaining about that. If anything, it just made it doubly hard for me to keep my hands off of him.

When he cleared the last step he came to a dead stop and I nearly plowed into his back.

"Alex," his voice was a breathy gasp, "this is...amazing."

Glancing around at the rooftop pool, complete with luxury loungers, large umbrellas to keep the sun at bay, and thick fluffy towels, I nodded my approval.

The crystal blue water of the pool looked cool and inviting.

"It's all ours. Complete privacy. We can be naked up here and no one will bother us."

He gave me a wicked smile, his blue eyes turning heated, as he fluttered his eyelashes at me. "Why Mr. Ortega, did you bring me here to take advantage of me?"

Pulling him into my arms, I stared down into his eyes. “I absolutely did.”

“Mmmm,” he hummed, his tongue darting out to moisten his bottom lip, “Take all the advantage you want.”

Our lips touched in a soft kiss that quickly turned heated. I would never grow tired of the taste of him, the way he felt in my arms .

The loud rumbling of Seth’s belly had us both breathlessly laughing.

“Did you say room service?” He rubbed a hand over his belly. “Because this little cock blocker is hungry.”

“Did you just call our child a cock blocker?” This time going down the stairs I made sure to take the lead, in case he lost his balance.

Seth giggled, the sound light in the air. “I did, yep. Doubt this will be the last time they interrupt us getting it on, either. Better get used to it. But I definitely want to revisit that pool later and the getting naked part.”

Jerking my foot from the pedicurist’s hands had been an involuntary response to her scrubbing my feet.

Laughing, I told her I was sorry. Seth peeled one eye open and gave me serious side-eye .

“It tickles!” I defended, trying not to squirm and yank my foot away a second time, as she scrubbed at my rough heels.

“It feels amazing,” Seth closed his eye, sinking back into the lightly massaging leather chairs.

I had to admit, it did feel good. This was my first ever pedicure, but Seth had begged me to get one with him.

Okay, he might have double dog dared me to get one more than actually begged, but same diff.

It had been fun watching him pick his nail color.

He took his time, and when I asked him what color he was thinking about, he shook his head and told me it depended on his mood.

So I had waited, idly picking colors I liked and thought would look good on him, only to have him shake his head at my choices.

“When the fuck have you ever even seen me wear brown, Alex?” he had asked, after one choice of what I thought was an appealing tan color.

“It’s nice.” Putting the bottle back, I had started to pick up a bottle of yellowish gold, but quickly moved my hand away when I saw the disgust on Seth’s face.

Finally, he had chosen two different shades of blue.

One a dark cobalt, the other a bright pastel.

The dark shade was now painted on his fingernails, while the lighter shade would soon be on his toes .

“Honey, you’re gonna need more than that buffer to get his heels in shape,” Seth told the pedicurist, taking a sip from his bottle of water. “Those things are rough.”

“Hey!” I tried to defend my poor feet but had no argument. I mean, they were feet,

and I didn't really think much about them. However, I had to say this pedicure felt wonderful, and I might be talked into doing this again.

The pedicurist nodded in agreement, and a look of solidarity passed between them.

"I've had worse," she assured me with a gentle smile, scrubbing harder.

"See!" I crowed, shooting Seth a smirk. "She's had worse."

"Doubtful," he smirked, and when I glanced at my pedicurist, she was smirking too. "She just wants to make sure you tip her."

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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

We fell into silence then, and I watched in fascination as Seth's toes were painted quickly and expertly.

The blue looked stunning on him, and I had to shift in my seat as my cock started to harden.

I had never paid any attention to any omega's toes before, painted or otherwise, but every single thing about Seth did it for me.

"How do they look?" he questioned softly, trying to stretch his leg so he could see his toes over his belly.

"Beautiful," I assured him, leaning over and planting a kiss on his lips. "Just like you."

He blinked, his hand coming up to cup my cheek. "Thank you for this, Alex. Truly. No one has ever done anything like this for me before. It's a bit...overwhelming," he admitted.

"Too much?"

My first priority was to keep my mate comfortable.

I didn't want Seth feeling stressed by anything, that included the things I had planned for him.

"You can tell me anytime you are feeling overwhelmed. We can go to the room and

do nothing. This weekend is about you, your needs. All your needs. I want you to be able to tell me when things are too much for you. Just like with the move, we'll figure out what you need. ”

He nibbled on his lower lip, and I gently stroked over the tender skin with my thumb. “You won’t be mad?”

“Was I mad when you hadn’t packed anything?” I questioned softly.

He swallowed hard, looking away from me. I would need to tip our pedicurist extra, as they were suddenly very focused on our feet and doing a skilled impression of ignoring our conversation.

“No, but you planned this wonderful weekend, and I don’t want you to think I’m not grateful. Because I am. I’ve just never had anyone treat me like you treat me, Alex, and I honestly don’t know what to do with...with...” he waved a hand in the air, at a loss to explain his feelings .

“With the emotions it makes you feel?” I supplied quietly.

He blew out a breath, turning back to look at me.

“Yeah. Usually when things are too much, I shut down. Or I go the opposite and I’m just way too much for people.

Too loud, too over-the-top, just too...everything.

But I don’t want to do that with you. Besides Bennett, you’re the first person I don’t feel like I need to put on a mask for.

I don’t have to be someone I’m not. And I don’t know what to do with any of it. ”

Shrugging, I leaned back in my chair and watched as my feet were towel dried. Since I hadn't wanted any polish, she was pretty much done with me. Seth was too; we were just waiting for his toes to dry.

Thankfully, this meant our pedicurists were cleaning up as much as they could until we left the chairs, and were ignoring us.

“Then don't do anything with it. Just feel what you're feeling. Talk to me; tell me if I'm being too pushy, or there's something you don't like or want. But please don't ever try to make yourself smaller for me, or less than you are. I love everything about you, Seth, just the way you are.”

“You...love me?” He sounded so unsure, so unlike himself, that it nearly broke my heart. The only other time I had heard him sound like this had been at dinner when I had met his family .

There was panic in his shining blue eyes, and I knew he wasn't ready to hear those words from my lips yet. Not in the capacity I wanted to shout them to the world. So, I quickly pivoted.

“I love your color, your sass, the way you know exactly who you are, and you aren't ashamed of it.

I love the way you dress, and the way you tell everyone exactly what you think about anything.

I even love your bratty side. I never want you to think that you need to change for me, or anyone.

And I want you to know that you can tell me anything and we'll talk it out.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, or stressed, or happy or sad, or mad.

Whatever it is, I want to be your person.

The person that will always be there, your rock to lean on.

I know all of this—us, the baby, the move—it's been fast, but I'm all in, Seth. ”

There was something he was chewing on in that whirling brain of his. I could see it as well as I could see the uncertainty in his eyes, the way his hand rested on the mound of his belly.

He'd tell me when he was ready, but I wouldn't push him.

Instead, I leaned back in my chair, bare feet propped up on the footrest, and adjusted the massage timer for another five minutes.

I hadn't expected today to turn so serious, had wanted it to be fun, relaxing, and stress free.

Finally, he quietly admitted, “I just get scared sometimes that all of this is only because of the baby. And once I have this baby, reality will set in, and you'll decide that I'm not worth the effort.”

Bringing his hand to my lips, I kissed his palm. “We're fated, carino , that's not how this works. Did you think I didn't know, watching you sashay towards me in this very hotel, that you were going to be trouble?”

He snorted, shaking his head, but he didn't pull his hand from mine. Instead, he entwined our fingers together tightly.



“And yes, all of this has been super-fast, but I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t want to.

I don’t do things I don’t want to do, Seth, and neither do you.

Regardless of the circumstances. I knew I wanted you long before I knew about this baby.

I missed you every single day we were apart and I didn’t even know your name.

But I knew a part of me was missing. You were that part.

I’m not going anywhere. Sorry not sorry, you’re stuck with me. ”

### Chapter Nineteen

Seth

I had never been more pampered or relaxed in my entire life.

After the pedicure, we'd been given the softest, most luxurious white robes to slip into for our couples massage.

Because I was pregnant, I had been on my back for the duration of my massage, but I hadn't even cared. The masseuse had magic hands and gently worked out knots I hadn't even known were there. Alex had looked just as blissed out as I felt, after his own massage.

We'd come back to the room, ordered room service, and then I had come up to the pool while Alex waited for our food.

The sun had just begun its downward descent in the sky, and I stood by the edge of the blue water of the pool and tilted my face into its warmth. Untying the robe, I let it slide off my naked body to pool at my feet.

Stretching my arms toward the bright beam of light, I tilted my head back and closed my eyes, before caressing my bump.

I heard Alex behind me, but I didn't turn around, didn't open my eyes.

A sharp click had me blinking my sleepy eyes open, and I looked over my shoulder at

Alex.

He was staring at his phone, clearly having taken my picture.

“I’d better not see that on some fetish porn site for pregnant omegas,” I teased him.

He glanced up from his phone, his voice raw and graveling, “You look beautiful.”

“I feel beautiful,” I admitted, because I did.

I felt like some sensual goddess, full of life.

“You would think I wouldn’t. My belly is huge, I haven’t seen my feet or my dick in months, my hip bones have all but disappeared under a layer of...

fluff. But I’ve honestly never felt sexier in my entire life.”

Slowly, I walked over to the concrete stairs built into the pool, and stuck my toe in.

If I stretched my leg out just far enough I might be able to glimpse the polish on my toes. The water was the perfect temperature on this blazing hot day, not too cold or too warm .

Wading in up to my chest, I flipped and floated on my back, my belly above the surface of the water.

If anyone saw me, I was sure I looked like a beached whale, but it was just Alex and me up here, in our own little private sanctuary. Just me and my alpha and our unborn pup.

It had been a perfect day and I never wanted it to end.

A wide splash had me blinking water from my eyes. Alex surfaced close to me, slicking his dark, wet hair back from his forehead and wiping the water from his eyes.

“I bet this is what it’s going to feel like in the birthing tub,” I murmured.

Alex’s wet hand rested on my bump, and the baby did a slow roll inside me at his touch. “Someone’s waking up.”

“Always this time of day. They better not have their days and nights mixed up when they get here. Ain’t nobody got time for that nonsense.”

“I’ve read about that in my book,” he told me, swimming away to do a lap, before returning to my side.

Cracking one eye opened, I questioned, “You’ve been reading baby books?”

“Of course. Baby books and a few on pregnant omegas.”

“Oh really?”

This was interesting news, and I wondered when he had been reading these books. I hadn’t seen any lying around his house, but I hadn’t been there every single night before the move .

“And did you learn anything interesting from these books, Mr. Ortega?”

He grinned at me, looking way too sexy all wet, with the sun turning the sky lovely shades of orange and red behind him. “I learned that I should pamper my omega.”

Shielding my eyes against the bright glare, and wishing I had grabbed my sunglasses, I snickered. “Nailed it.”

“Mmmm,” he slid between my legs, pulling me into his chest like I weighed next to nothing, which I knew wasn’t true. Maybe in the water I did though.

Instinctively, I wrapped my legs around his waist, realizing Alex hadn’t bothered to grab swim trunks and was just as naked as I was.

Looping my arms around his neck, his hands cupped my ass cheeks, pulling me as close to him as my belly would allow. I let Alex and the water hold me up, and he swam us over to the side of the pool.

He nibbled the side of my neck, sucking the lobe of my ear into his mouth before releasing it. Goosebumps broke out across my shoulders and arms that were above the waters surface, and I moaned in need.

“And I learned that orgasms are good for you.”

His cock nudged my hole, before sliding back along my crease.

Gasping in pleasure, my back against the hard concrete of the pool, I told him, “I think you made that part up. But if the book said it, we should probably try it. ”

“Good idea. Hold on tight.”

His hands spread my cheeks, and then his cock was pushing inside of me, aided by the water and the slick my body was already producing. I couldn’t really do much more than tighten my thighs around him, my fingers tangling in the wet strands of his hair.

“Touch yourself,” Alex growled, as his cock sliding in and out of me left me panting for air.

Whimpers of need escaped my lips, and I closed my eyes and grasped my cock.

Sensations surrounded me; the cool water lapping at my skin, the heat of the sun's rays blazing across my skin, a strange mixture of hot and cold, the feel of Alex's cock filling and stretching me, my back scraping the pool with each thrust of his hips.

My hand pumped my own dick as Alex found the perfect rhythm, pegging my prostate with each thrust.

"Yes, there!" I cried, "Right fucking there! Gonna come!"

Alex's hips were moving with a frenzied need, as was my hand on my own cock.

Each thrust pushed me against the pool wall, forcing the air to whoosh from my lungs on a high-pitched cry.

"Come!" Alex demanded in my ear, his teeth nipping my earlobe sharply and I saw stars .

The heat of his cum in my hole was a shock after the cold water, and I dug my nails into his shoulders, my body shaking with the force of my orgasm.

I whined when Alex pulled out before his knot could catch on my rim.

"Don't think the pool is the best place for us to be knotted together," he panted.

I couldn't make sensible words, so I just rested my head on his shoulder, mumbling, "k."

Between the mind-blowing orgasm and the water, I was boneless.

After a few minutes, and our breathing had evened out, Alex swam us over to the steps and he sat half in the water, turning me so I was draped over his lap.

“Our food is getting cold,” he murmured, his hand resting on my belly.

“Alex,” I whispered softly, barely loud enough for him to hear me. “I love you.”

He stilled beneath me, and I opened my eyes to stare into his brown depths. He didn’t say anything, the look on his face a cross between joy and wondering if he had heard me correctly.

So I repeated it. “I love you.”

He swallowed hard, his Adam’s apple bobbing with the movement, his eyes filled with tenderness. “I love you too, Seth. ”

“Thank you for today,” I laid my head back on his shoulder with a little sigh. “Thank you for everything. I know I probably don’t say that enough. How do I say I love you in Spanish?”

He gave me a soft look, a smile tugging at his lips, “ Te amo.”

Snuggling into him, I kissed his cheek and whispered, “ Te amo.”

### Chapter Twenty

Seth

August

Of course, I had gone over my due date.

This baby had been snug and cozy and quite happy staying right where they were.

At my last appointment, Naomi had even conferred with Finn on just how long they were comfortable waiting for me to go into labor on my own.

As I wasn't happy with any of the options they had discussed with me, from starting my labor to a c-section, I had been having some hard discussions with the baby on how urgent it was for them to get their little booty in gear.

I'd even been practically forcing Alex to have sex with me all the time to try to get my labor started .

The poor man was never one to say no to me, especially a naked me, but even he was starting to look at me like a deer caught in headlights when I would call his name in my I-want-you-to-come-fuck-me voice.

The last time he had practically whined, "Sweetheart, I love you, but I'm chafed. Can't we just, I don't know, try going for a walk? Or spicy food? Abuela sent some spicy tamales for me. And we can add hot sauce."



I'd taken pity on him and ate the tamales—not a hardship, honestly, since they were delicious—smothering them in the hottest sauce there was, and...nothing.

Besides a terrible case of indigestion, that had left me burping and farting and both of us miserable.

Finally—fucking finally, with mere days to spare before we were medically going to have to help this stubborn kid along—I had woken up when my water had broken in the wee hours of the early morning.

Well, not gonna lie, I thought for a minute I had peed the bed, before I realized exactly what had happened.

Rubbing my ginormous mound of a belly, I whispered in the dark, “August thirteenth, huh? Please tell me you aren’t going to be one of those perpetually late people, because I can’t have that. This is your one time of being late for a very important date.”

Alex rolled over, mumbling, “Are you reading the baby Alice In Wonderland ?”

“Just having a come to Goddess convo, since my water broke, and they’ve decided to finally show their face. Fucking late as hell, and we won’t be doing that bullshit going forward. This is the one and only time they are allowed to show up fashionably late.”

Alex sprang up so fast in bed, I nearly bounced off the side. He was cute as hell, with his hair a mess and his dark eyes comically wide open.

“What?!”

I could see who was going to be the calm one now. Calm alpha had left the building,

leaving me in charge.

Smoothing the blankets over my legs, I held up a finger, breathing through my first slightly painful contraction. Nearly laughing when Alex's eyes got more panicked as the contraction continued.

Really, it didn't last terribly long and was only about a four on the pain scale. I was going to need him to calm his nerves, because this show was just getting started.

When the contraction ended and I had casually noted the time on my phone, I gave him a wide, happy grin. "My water fucking finally broke."

Sliding out of bed, I waddled towards the bathroom, waving my hand behind me as I went.

"We, and by we , I mean you , need to change the sheets. Actually, maybe get the bed set up with the rubber mattress thingy now, since the sheets need to come off. I don't know, it might be too early for that?"

Hmmm, make good choices, I'm leaving that decision up to you.

I'm taking a shower now to get this amniotic fluid off me. "

Once I had the water heating up in the shower, I poked my head out the bathroom door.

Alex was still sitting in bed, looking like he had not one clue what was happening or why it was happening when it was still freaking dark outside.

Snapping my fingers in his direction to get his attention, I shook my head at him.

“Whatever this is, I’m gonna need you to snap the fuck out of it. Call Naomi, change the sheets and then fill the birthing tub.” As an afterthought, I tacked on a sweet, “Please.”

Alex licked his lips, looked at me, then over to the colorless wet spot in the middle of my side of the bed.

“Are you okay? In pain? What should I do?”

Oh boy. He had clearly not heard a word I had just said. I’d been snapping out orders like a drill sergeant, and my usually capable alpha had zone the fuck out.

“Babe, I’m fine. I’m just in labor. Fucking finally.”

His attention turned back to me, standing in my full naked, pregnant glory.

The last few weeks I had been a walking furnace and hated sleeping in anything. Plus it was August and hot as Hades outside. Even with the A.C. on, I was sweating buckets .

I didn’t miss the way his brown eyes heated as he looked his fill. Alex made it clear every day how desirable he found me pregnant.

As long I wasn’t practically force fucking him to get this kid out of me, that is.

“Call Naomi,” I repeated slowly, giving him another smile.

He nodded in understanding, repeating under his breath, “Call Naomi. I can do this.”

“Yep, you can,” I told him. “I have faith in you!”

We'd work on his other assignments when I was cleaned up.

"Maybe make a cup of coffee. Or two or three," I called, pulling the shower curtain back. "I need you to get your brain online."

The warm water felt amazing on my skin, and I leaned against the shower wall and let the water beat against my lower back when another contraction hit.

This one was slightly more painful than the last, but still not too bad. I knew that wouldn't last, but right now, my contractions were about ten minutes apart and mild.

Unless something drastically changed, we likely had a long day—and possibly night—ahead of us.

Alex came into the bathroom, poking his head around the curtain. "Contraction?"

Nodding, I kept my eyes closed, allowing myself to relax as much as possible and find my Zen place .

I knew a ton of doctors and nurses who urged laboring omegas to keep their eyes open and focused on one object. But I had always done better managing pain with my eyes closed.

When the pain ebbed, I blinked my eyes open and gave him another reassuring smile.

"I'd say it lasted about forty-five seconds, about ten minutes apart."

Alex noted the time on the phone in his hand, "I called Naomi. She wants you to call her and give her specifics I couldn't tell her.

She told me to change the sheets, which I did, and said I could go ahead and put the

rubber pad on when I remake it, or I can wait.

I wasn't sure if you wanted me to wait until you were closer to delivery?

And to get the tub filled if you want to get in it. ”

“Babe,” shutting the water off, I took the towel he handed me and wrapped it around me, “that’s exactly what I told you to do.”

He gave me a startled look. “You did?”

He helped me out of the tub, making sure I didn’t lose my balance. Giving him a quick peck on his cheek, I snickered, “Yeah. Drink that coffee.”

I nodded towards the steaming cup he had sat on the vanity. “I need you awake and engaged. Though,” yawning loudly, I padded back to the bedroom, “we might be able to get some more sleep. ”

“Sleep?” he squeaked, trailing after me and picking up the towel I had let fall to the floor. “You expect me to sleep now? You’re in labor!”

Sighing as I slid back into the now freshly made-up bed, I rubbed a hand over my belly. “I’m going to be in labor for a while.”

Reaching for my phone, I dialed Naomi, who answered on the first ring, sounding way more awake and cheerful than anyone should at three in the morning.

“Alex says today’s the day,” she said happily.

“Finally,” I told her. “This baby is in no hurry.”

“How far apart are your contractions and intensity?”

“About ten minutes, lasting about forty-five seconds, in between a four and a five,” I relayed to her. “Not bad yet, though they are starting in my back which isn’t a good time. I’m going to try to get some more sleep before I call Bennett.”

“Sounds good,” I could almost see her nodding her head of dark curls over the phone.

“Feel free to get in the tub when you want. Call me when your contractions hit seven minutes apart. Sooner if you feel like things start moving quickly. You know your body, so if you think something is happening, don’t hesitate to call even if your contractions are still farther apart. ”

“I will,” I promised. We went over a couple more things before ending the call .

Alex sipped his coffee, listening to my side of the conversation. He took my hand in his free one when I put my phone back on the nightstand, giving it a squeeze. “I’m nervous.”

Smirking, I nodded, “I know. I’m fine. The baby is fine. It’s going to be awhile, so I need you to relax.”

“I’m worried,” he admitted, not for the first time. “I trust Naomi knows what she’s doing, but...are you sure you won’t consider going to the hospital?”

Shaking my head, I wiggled around until I was lying on my pillow. “What did you do with my pregnancy pillow?”

He looked around the room, spotting the pillow on the armchair. Retrieving it, he helped me get it situated.

“And no,” I said, answering his question. “I really want to do this at home.”

We’d had this same conversation numerous times over the past months.

Cupping his cheek where he was still bending over me, I gave him another smile, hoping if I kept smiling and stayed chill, he would relax.

“I can’t explain why I want to do it this way, just that I know I do.

Look, hospitals are great, I’m a nurse for Pete’s sake.

But they aren’t conducive to calm. I want calm right now.

I need calm. I need to be in my space, our space.

It’s why I told my mom she had to stay home until after I delivered.

I love her to death, but I think she would make me nervous.

Same way with your family. Love them to death, but that is way too many people that would be crowded in here. That is not calm.”

It was true, I had come to know and love Alex’s huge, wonderful family. But there were a lot of strong, opinionated alphas and omegas, and I just didn’t need that energy today.

“I’m enough chaos, but I want our baby to come into this world with as much peace around them as possible.

I promise, if at any point, Naomi says we need to go to the hospital, I won’t argue.

Okay? We'll go. And Finn is on standby. He's a phone call away if she needs to call him to assist here. I'm not opposed to that either."

Alex stared into my eyes for what felt like a full minute. "You promise? No brattiness? No temper tantrum? No being stubborn just because you can? If she says we need to go to the hospital, we go."

"I promise," leaning up, I captured his lips in a soft kiss, then pulled away as the beginning of another contraction began. The pain was definitely starting in my back and radiating forward.

"Fucking back labor," I moaned, closing my eyes and breathing through it until it was over. "Back labor can suck my dick."

"Still ten minutes apart," Alex told me, chuckling at my commentary.

"Yep," patting the empty spot next to me, I indicated for him to come back to bed. "Let's try to get some sleep. "

He climbed in beside me, muttering, "How the fuck are you going to sleep having contractions every ten minutes?"

"I'll doze in between."



### Chapter Twenty-One

Seth

Surprisingly, I did manage to doze between the contractions for another two hours.

Finally, the back labor made me groan out loud, and I told Alex it was time to fill the tub. I was hoping floating in the soothing water would ease the pain in my back some.

My contractions were about seven minutes apart now but lasting the same amount of time as they had been. The pain was at about a six on the pain scale.

But because of the back labor, I couldn't even lie on my back, which was why I couldn't wait to get into the birthing tub.

It took another forty-five minutes or so for the tub to be filled and heated to the correct temperature.

Alex kept checking it like his life depended on the temperature not going over the recommended range of ninety-seven to one hundred degrees Fahrenheit.

"It's ninety-eight," he called over his shoulder, and I nodded, pacing the length of the bedroom, my hands pushed into my lower back.

"Let me text Bennett and then you can help me in."

Shooting off a quick text to my bestie to let him know all the things were happening

today, I shuffled over to the tub Alex had set up in a corner of the room.

He had cleared out a spot weeks ago in preparation, going so far as to even get his measuring tape out and plotting it all out. Which had been super cute. Alex made one hell of a sexy handyman. Well, handyman wannabe, because honestly, he wasn't all that handy when it came to things like that.

But he knew how to dial and call someone to get things done like a pro. Which was just as sexy in my book.

My phone dinged with an incoming text. It was barely six a.m., but I knew Bennett was likely up with baby Brodie. At just barely eight months old, Brodie wasn't sleeping through the night yet.

Bennett: OMG FINALLY! I thought you were just going to be pregnant forever! Let me get things settled here and I'll be over. I'm so excited! But hey, at least it's Saturday. That kid may be late, but it's convenient for me. LOL

Me: No rush, B. I'm getting in the tub now. This back labor is a bitch! I'll tell Alex to unlock the door for you.

Bennett: Love you, Sethy!

Me: Love you, B! Can you believe I'm about to have a baby? A baby! Me! Who would have thought?

Bennett: You're going to be a fantastic dad, Seth. \*Heart emoji\*

Me: \*heart emoji\* \*crying emoji\*

Alex was watching me as I sat my phone down, a frown on his face. "Everything

okay?”

Nodding, I gave him a trembling smile, and I knew from the heat behind my eyes they were glistening with tears. I wasn't sure I could put into words all I was feeling in that moment, or just how much Bennett's faith in my ability to be a good parent meant to me.

Swallowing around the lump in my throat, I held onto his arms as I put a foot over the edge of the rubber pool .

“Bennett's going to get the kids and Shay taken care of and be over. Can you make sure the door is unlocked for him?”

Once I was settled into the blissful water, he kissed the top of my messy hair. “I'll do it now, so I don't forget. Okay here for a minute?”

“Yeah,” I whispered, “I'm good. This feels amazing. Just what my back needed.”

He frowned, “I hate that you're hurting this much.”

The unspoken I could be in a hospital enjoying a nice epidural hung unsaid in the air.

“It's all part of having a baby.”

Sighing in pleasure, I leaned my head back against the rim of the tub, closing my eyes and letting the warm water relax me.

Running my hand over my belly as it tightened with another contraction, I focused on getting through the pain. Alex's large hand covered mine in the water, soothing small circles into my skin until I opened my eyes and gave him a little nod to indicate it had passed.

“Your stomach is like a rock,” he observed, still running his hand over my skin.

“Go unlock the door and come get in with me,” I ordered him. “I want to lean on you. Besides, Bennett says I’ll forget the pain once the baby is here.”

Alex stood, shaking his head and his arm, displacing droplets of water onto the hardwood floor .

“Not sure how that is even possible,” he muttered.

Shrugging, I told him, “Probably nature’s way of making sure the human race doesn’t die out. Just make sure you stay up by my head when I’m actually pushing this baby out. I don’t want you traumatized by anything you might see down there.”

I swished a hand in the water in the general direction of my nether regions. “My hole is a thing of wonder and beauty, and I don't want what’s going to happen ruin your thinking on that.”

Bending down, he kissed me on the tip of my nose. “You are a thing of wonder and beauty.”

Swatting at him, because my emotions were all over the place right now and I couldn’t deal with him being all sweet and swoony, I made a shooining motion at him.

“Door. Go.”

Less than ten minutes later, Alex eased himself into the tub behind me, wearing a pair of black swim trunks.

He spread his legs around me, and I floated peacefully, the top of my head resting just under his chin, his heartbeat in my ears where I rested against his chest.

After what seemed an eternity but probably wasn't all that long, my contractions were seven minutes apart and lasting a little over a minute each time, growing more painful. Alex placed another call to Naomi. She arrived shortly after, Bennett right behind her, chatting away .

Naomi smiled her bright smile at me, watching as I leaned forward in the pool on my knees, my head resting on my arms across the top. Alex rubbed my lower back for me, as the pain in my back had gotten more intense.

“We’re going to get the bed made up, and then I’d like to check how far along you are,” she told us.

In the middle of a contraction, all I could do was make a humming type noise and nod my head against my arm, acknowledging I had heard her.

“His back is really hurting him,” Alex told her quietly, his fingers kneading the soft flesh of my lower back.

I could hear them moving around the room, the rustling of sheets and things being set out, but I concentrated on my breathing, of riding the waves of pain out, until finally they subsided. Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes to survey the room.

Since I had insisted on Bennett being here, Naomi had asked if he would help her with some simple things like making sure the bed was covered and washing the baby after I had them.

They were even covering the dressers and nightstands with drop cloths painters used, which I found a bit funny, but whatever. She was the expert on these things.

“Can I get back in the water after you’ve checked me?”

Alex held me tightly as I got out of the pool, until I was steady on my feet .

“Absolutely,” she assured me. “You can stay in the water until closer to delivery if that’s what you’re comfortable with. Or get out and walk and get back in. Whatever you need to do.”

Alex dried me tenderly, kissing my rounded belly, and looking up at me from under his dark lashes.

“You’re so beautiful like this,” he whispered, his voice tight with emotion.

He had made me feel beautiful my entire pregnancy, always touching me, kissing me, and telling me how attractive he found me. But to hear him say the words now, when I had been laboring for hours, sweating and pruned from the water, nearly made me glow inside.

The next few hours passed in a blur of floating in the water, and using different positions to ease the pain of the contractions, which were growing more intense with each one.

After one contraction had me crying out, clinging to Alex for dear life, I felt something shift inside me, low in my belly.

Naomi, sensing the change in my panting or just because she was an awesome ass midwife, knelt down on the floor next to the pool.

“Do you want me to check you again?” she asked quietly .

She had just checked my progress only about twenty minutes before and I had been about seven centimeters dilated and not quite fully effaced yet.

But something was definitely happening inside my body. There was a pressure between my legs, and it felt like the baby had dropped down even further in my pelvic region.

“Yeah,” I gasped, biting my lip, “something’s happening.”

She nodded her head, her eyes fixed on Alex, speaking words without saying them aloud. He seemed to understand as he quickly got out of the pool, not even bothering to dry off before he was helping me upright.

“Argh!” I cried, pain searing across my lower back and wrapping around my front. My legs felt like jelly and my knees started to buckle.

Alex deftly swung me into his arms in a bridal carry and gently laid me on the bed.

I had long ago stopped worrying about who saw what when Naomi examined me. I mean, it was just Alex and Bennett anyway, but any small piece of modesty I had—which truthfully wasn’t much—was gone.

Naomi waited for the next contraction before checking me, and I cried out with the pressure and pain. Both my hands were engulfed, one by Alex and one by Bennett, and I squeezed each of them with all my strength. Beyond thankful they were both here, giving me an anchor to hold on to.

“Alright, Seth,” Naomi spoke so softly and calmly I wondered how she managed it, “it’s showtime. This baby seems to be out of patience and is ready to meet the world. You’re fully dilated and effaced. No more walking or water, it’s baby time.”

Panting as the contraction eased off, I barely had time to catch my breath before the next one hit.

“What do I need to do?” Alex asked, wiping my sweaty brow with a cool cloth.

“On his next contraction I’m going to have him push. I want you to get behind him and give him something to lean against. Bennett, you count him through the contraction. Seth?”

“Hmm,” panting, I let them all maneuver me just how they wanted, spreading my bent knees wide.



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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:30 am*

Everything else was just sort of white noise at this point; the crinkle of the plastic sheet beneath the fitted one we had bought just for today, knowing we would need to toss it out.

Bennett's soft questions to Naomi and her answers.

Alex whispering nonsense words of encouragement and love in my ear.

My focus was on the pain threatening to tear me in two, the burning pressure of my hole, the need to push my baby out. My body no longer felt like it belonged to me. But it was doing what it was made to do, and I was just along for the ride.

Naomi's voice floated over me, still soft and serene, but one hundred percent confident in her abilities and in charge.

"Next contraction you're going to push for the count of ten. You don't stop until you hear Bennett say ten, okay? Shout, scream, cuss out Alex, whatever you need to do, but most of all you push with everything you've got."

That's exactly what I did. Pushed, grunted, screamed, told Alex he was never, ever, ever, ever getting near me with his cock again as long as we both lived.

Until finally the burning pressure was almost too much, and I was sure this time I would be split in two. Then suddenly it stopped, and Naomi was telling me to stop pushing.

Panting, I leaned back against Alex, drawing his quiet strength around me.

“You’re doing so good, sweetheart,” he breathed, “you’re fucking amazing. So strong.”

“You’re doing great, Seth,” Bennett gave my hand a squeeze.

“What’s happening?” I asked, my voice raw and hoarse. “Why are we stopping? Is the baby here? Why aren’t they crying?”

Naomi’s steady voice calmed me. “Everything is good, Seth. The baby’s head is out. Now we work on delivering their shoulders. Nice and easy push on the next contraction, okay? The baby is a bit bigger than we anticipated, and we need to go gently.”

“Stupid, big ass alpha,” I muttered, turning and nuzzling my head into Alex.

A soft kiss landed amidst my sweat soaked hair. “Sorry, sweetheart.”

On the next contraction, I felt the baby slip from my body, angry wails filling the room.

Tears spilled over my eyes at the cries, relief and happiness and entire feelings I couldn’t even begin to name that engulfed me.

“Daddy, you want to come and cut your daughter’s cord?” Naomi held out a pair of surgical scissors to Alex, and my mind whirled.

Daughter. We had a daughter.

Alex looked gobsmacked, tears falling unashamed down his cheeks, and all he could do was nod silently.

“Go,” I whispered, “go see our daughter.”

He eased away from me gently, but not before he and Bennett placed some soft pillows behind my back.

I couldn’t see what he was doing, but I had a clear view of his face and all the many emotions that washed over him as he cut the tie holding our child to me.

Naomi wrapped her in a soft blanket, after a very quick wipe off, then handed her to Alex .

He stared down into her face, his own radiating pure love and joy. Moving over to me, he eased down onto the bed, handing her to me.

“She’s beautiful,” he whispered, his voice heavy with emotion. “She’s beautiful like you.”

Staring down at the squalling, red-faced baby, I had to agree with him.

Wet, dark hair was matted against her forehead, and she was pissed. Not at all happy about finally making her way out of the warm place she’d resided in for the past several months.

Looking up at Alex, tears in my eyes, I whispered, “We made her. Alex, we made her.”

“We did,” he agreed, running one hand over her head, then touching her little fingers like she was made out of glass.

“She’s gorgeous,” Bennett told us, reaching to take her, which I balked at. “I’m going to get her cleaned up and then you can have her back. And Naomi will need to give

her a look over when she's finished with you."

Dammit, I hated when he made sense.

Reluctantly, I let him take the baby from me, my eyes tracking him as he took her into the bathroom, where we already had a baby bath stored.

Alex was doing the exact same thing I was, and I could almost feel the indecision in him. His need to stay by my side and his need to be near our pup .

Leaning my head against his side, I whispered, "Go be with her. You'll need to scent her, then bring her back to me."

He looked so torn, his muscles wound tight. "Are you sure?"

"I'm fine," I assured him, grimacing when Naomi began massaging my tender abdomen to help deliver the afterbirth. "You don't need to see this anyway. Trust me, it's gross. I've seen it and yeah, pass."

Naomi tried to hide her smile, but I saw her, and an amused look passed between the two of us. I had been more than happy when my Labor and Delivery rotation had ended when I had worked at the hospital. I was quite happy dealing with babies after they had been delivered, thank you very much.

"I could use someone's help when you're done washing the baby," Naomi called into the open door of the bathroom a few minutes later. "How's your pain, Seth? Do you want me to administer some pain relief?"

I had been vocal about not wanting any drugs during delivery, but now that the baby had been born, and the adrenaline was wearing off, I was hurting.

Nodding, I whispered, “Yes, please and thank you.”

She gave me another of her warm smiles as she filled a syringe, administering the drug into my thigh. “You did amazing, by the way. Seriously. ”

The drug worked quickly to take the edge off, and my eyes flicked back to the open bathroom door.

I could just see Alex’s back, and every now and then would see Bennett’s arm. I could hear the soft murmur of their voices, but didn’t use my shifter hearing to listen in to their conversation. The baby had quieted now, seemingly content to be bathed or just happy that her alpha daddy was near.

My eyes grew heavy with the exhaustion of the day, and the pain medication. I let myself doze off, only to be jostled awake by the bed moving. Or maybe because I was moving. Alex had me in his arms, holding me close.

“Wha’s hap’ening?” I slurred.

He placed a soft kiss on my lips, which were feeling a bit chapped.

“Bennett and Naomi are putting clean sheets on the bed. Do you want pajamas, or you still mostly no clothes?”

That woke me up some. “Um, I’m going to need shorts or something. There’s going to be...I’m bleeding...or leaking...there’s just stuff for a few days.”

“Yeah, we already got that squared away, sweetheart,” he told me with a soft chuckle. “You slept through it.”

Glancing down over the still swollen mound of my belly I could just make out the

waistband of a pair of soft cotton shorts. “Oh.”

“All set,” Bennett called, smoothing the sheet with his hand .

Alex laid me gently on the freshly made bed, then pulled the flat sheet over my lower half. Naomi brought the baby over and handed her to me.

“Nearly nine pounds, Seth,” she informed us. “She’s a good size for you. Twenty-one inches, and a ten on the Apgar.”

I snuggled the baby close to my chest, relishing the hefty weight of her in my arms. She stared up at me, her blue eyes assessing sleepily, and smacked her perfect pink bow lips.

“She has your eyes,” Alex whispered, running one finger over her fluffy dark hair.

“Most babies have blue eyes when they’re born,” I told him, “I bet hers will turn dark like yours. She has your skin tone.” My arm looked extra pale next to her light brown skin.

Bennett sat down gingerly on the other side of me, and Naomi was speaking quietly on her phone. Likely relaying information of the birth to Finn. I knew he had been on standby should she have needed him, or if I would have had to go to the hospital.

“Does she have a name?” Bennett asked, grinning broadly but looking just as tired as I felt.

Honestly, I didn’t even know what time it was, but looking out the bedroom window I saw night had fallen.

Glancing at Alex, I raised a brow at him, and he nodded.

We hadn't wanted to find out the sex of the baby at our ultrasound. Both of us agreed we wanted to be surprised .

Agreeing on names had been much more difficult. We had vetoed more than we had put on the maybe list. We had finally narrowed it down to two names for each sex, deciding we would pick the name when we saw the baby.

It was something I had heard many parents say, and honestly, I had always thought it made no sense. You either liked a name for your kid or you didn't.

But when it had been time for us to choose, to pick a name for a human being to carry the rest of their lives, it had been overwhelming and daunting.

What if we screwed it up? And suddenly, waiting until we saw the baby made absolute sense.

Looking down at the perfect little person in my arms, who, after all the fussing she had done, was now content to stare at us with unfocused eyes, I knew exactly what her name was.

"Isabella Rose Ortega," I told my bestie.

"Bella," Alex said, at the same time I said, "Izzy."

Scowling at him, I repeated firmly, "Izzy."

"Mocoso Bonito ," he muttered, before giving in. "Izzy."

"Well, that's just beautiful," Bennett told me, snapping a picture of us with his phone and quickly sending it to someone. "Shay said Lucas is refusing to go to bed until he sees proof that his, and I'm quoting here, 'Baby cousin has finally been born, please

Goddess, can it be a girl.’ ”

Laughing, then wincing at the pain jiggling my stomach caused me, I grinned. “That kid is jonesing for a baby sister.”

Bennett stood, stretching his back. “Tell me about it. So, thanks for having a girl, now I don’t have to.”

“Anytime,” Grinning, I frowned when Izzy began to fuss.

“She’s probably hungry,” Naomi had ended her call and had come back over to the bed. “Do you still want to try nursing?”

Nodding, I told her, “I do. If it doesn’t work out, or it’s not for me, we can go all bottle. But I would like to pump, so that she can at least have my milk, either way.”

Alex watched with rapt attention as Naomi helped me get the baby to latch on.

“I’m going to head home,” Bennett told us quietly, after a few minutes of Izzy sucking.

“Oh, my Goddess, I don’t even know what time it is?”

“It’s nine-thirty. It’s not too late,” Bennett assured me. “Do you want me to call your parents?”

“I called them,” Alex told us both. “And my family. They’re going to stop by tomorrow morning and later in the afternoon. I figured I’d let you tell your little chatty omega group.”

“I got it covered,” Bennett grinned, then kissed my cheek. He followed it up with a



big hug for Alex, then snuck in a kiss to the baby when I switched her to my other nipple.

Once he had left, Naomi went over some things with Alex and me, then promised to be back first thing in the morning to check on both of us.

Finally, we were alone, and I yawned widely, exhausted.

“How’s your pain?” Alex asked, straightening from placing a sleeping Izzy in the bassinet he had pulled next to the bed. “Naomi left some pain killers.”

“Mmm,” I gingerly scooted down in the bed, noting the time since she had administered the shot. “I’m okay for now.”

Surprisingly, I really wasn’t feeling half bad at the moment. I knew I needed to stay on top of the pain though.

“I’ll take a pill when she gets up for her next feeding.” I would need to check my bleeding and change the birthing pad, too.

Alex yawned then, pulling the shirt he had donned after helping bathe Izzy over his head and tossing it on the floor, which was so unlike him I let out a small laugh.

He climbed into bed, careful not to jostle me too much. “I’ll get it in the morning. I’m exhausted. And we need to sleep while she does. I have a feeling she’s going to be up every couple of hours. ”

“Probably.” He pulled the bedspread over us, turning out the bedside light. “I want a proper shower tomorrow. And a massive breakfast.”

He let me get snuggled into his side, then asked, “Anything else, sweetheart?”

“Coffee,” I mumbled, “so much freaking coffee. An entire pot of it.” One cup a day had been torture.

Alex brushed a kiss over the top of my head, and I craned my neck up to chase his lips. He bent down, his lips capturing mine in a sweet kiss that still managed to curl my toes, if nothing else at the moment.

“I love you, my pretty brat. Thank you for stealing my drink that night. And thank you for our beautiful daughter.”

“Anytime,” I grinned at him in the darkness. “And I love you too, Alejandro. So very much.”

### Epilogue

Alex

New Year's Eve

Standing in the hotel lobby, I turned when I heard someone call my name.

We had stepped out of the noisy, crowded ballroom, so that Seth could call his parents to check on Izzy. Since my fingers had been itching to dial my phone myself, relief had washed through me when he had said he needed to call and check on her.

As Seth had walked further into the lobby to get away from the noise, I had gone to the front desk to order a bottle of champagne to be sent up to our room. I wanted this night to be perfect, as I had an important question to ask my mate .

My eyes widened as I saw my ex, River, sashaying towards me, a drink in his hands and a gleam in his eyes.

He nibbled on the thin straw as he made his way over to me, somehow making the act look sensual. Still, it had no effect on me, but I plastered an indulgent smile on my face.

“River,” I acknowledged, then gave the hand he planted in the middle of my chest a pointed look. One he chose to blatantly ignore.

Instead of removing his hand, he trailed it further down my body. Catching his wrist

firmly in mine, I pushed his arm away.

Adopting a sullen look, he pushed his bottom lip out in a pout I had once been unable to resist.

“Alex, don’t be like that. You can’t possibly still be mad.”

“I’m not mad,” I assured him. “Are you here alone?”

We were at the hotel Seth and I had met at, having bought their same New Year’s Eve package as the year before. With one exception.

This year I had upgraded massively, and booked the honeymoon penthouse suite we had stayed at on our baby moon. If things went according to plan, we would be celebrating something besides the new year in a few hours.

It also marked the first time we had been away from Izzy for any length of time. Even though we weren’t going to be gone that long, leaving her had been harder on both of us than we had expected.

River glanced over his shoulder at the double doors to the ballroom, shrugging.

“I came with a couple of single friends. We were hoping to meet some eligible alphas.” Turning back to me, he waved one hand in my direction. “And then poof, here you are.”

My grin broadened when I heard my mate growl, “What in the actual fuck! Mom, I’ve gotta go. Some little boytoy is getting handsy with my man.”

Shaking my head, I informed River, “I’m not here alone, and I am not eligible. Sorry.”

“Everything good with the baby?” I asked Seth, as he slid next to me, one arm sliding around my waist, while the other was planted firmly on my stomach, directly above my cock.

My mate was without a doubt staking his claim.

Seth smiled up at me, even as he watched River from the corner of his eyes.

“All good. The grandparents are playing swap the baby, even though we are only going to be gone for two nights. I think I know where she will be when we get home, but we might need to double check once we hit town. I got distracted by my alpha getting felt up by some rent boy and might have stopped listening.”

“Baby?” River asked, astonished. “You have a baby?”

Seth turned and gave River a thin-lipped smile, annoyance clear in his blue eyes. “Who the fuck are you and why are you touching my mate? ”

A laugh barked out of me before I could contain it. I did love it when Seth got all territorial. It didn’t happen often, but when it did I secretly preened a bit inside.

“Mate?” River exclaimed, his face falling.

“Seth, this is River,” I introduced them. “We used to date. River, my mate, Seth.”

“Oh, I’ve heard about you,” Seth raised one brow in what could only be perceived as a challenge. “The cheater.”

River’s face flushed brightly, as he stammered, “We weren’t exclusive!”

I wouldn’t have been surprised if he stamped his foot, but even his lie didn’t faze me.

There was no point arguing with River about our relationship. It was a blip in my past, and nothing more.

“Well, one of you for sure wasn’t,” Seth said dryly.

“Yes,” I responded to River’s question, not bothering to argue with River about our relationship. “We have a daughter. She’s four months old and is every bit as pretty as her daddy.”

“If you’ll excuse us, this is our first kid free night since she was born, and I have plans for my alpha,” Seth gave me a wicked, heated look that had my blood sizzling and my cock waking up. “Let’s go up to the suite. I want to get you naked.”

River made some sort of strangled sound, but my attention was totally focused on my omega. “I thought you wanted to see if you could convince the D.J. to play some salsa.”

Seth pushed his body more firmly into mine and slid his hand up my chest. “I want to do something else now.”

“Yeah?” I whispered, getting lost in his eyes, the feel of his body next to mine, the scent of peaches on his skin.

The last few months had been a blur of sleepless nights, dirty diapers, and trying to manage a new baby while both of us worked full-time. We hadn’t had any alone time, and we needed a couple of days to reconnect.

“What do you have in mind, carino?”

Pulling my head down for a heated kiss, Seth whispered in my ear, “Alex, I want you to claim me. Tonight. Now.”

My mouth went dry as fire licked up my body, all my nerve endings tingled, and my fingers ached to get him naked.

Right this minute.

The sounds around us disappeared, and all I heard was my heartbeat loud in my ears, the sound of Seth's harsh breathing, the desire shining in his eyes, and I grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the elevators.

Someone huffed, making a squeaking sound, but I didn't care who it was. River, most likely. My entire focus was on my mate.

The doors opened, and I waited impatiently while the car emptied of guests eager to ring in the new year.

My body hummed with lust, my fingers entwined tightly with Seth's. I was hyper aware of every sound he made, the slightest flicker of his fingers against mine, the way his breathing was fast and harsh.

After an eternity, the car was empty and we were headed up to our suite. Seth slammed his hand on the emergency stop and the car jerked to a jarring halt.

"What?" I licked dry lips, watching in anticipation as Seth put a finger to my lips.

"No talking. Just feeling."

He slid to his knees, and had my cock out of my pants before I could blink.

Bracing my arms on the sides of the car, I moaned loudly when he swallowed the head of my cock inside the sizzling warmth of his wet mouth. The sound of my voice sounded loud inside the small metal car, but I couldn't be bothered to care.

Not when I looked down at Seth's dark head bobbing on my dick. With each swallow, more of me slipped inside, until my tip hit the back of his throat and he gagged on me.

That sound, the sight of tears streaming down his face, streaking his eyeliner, shouldn't be the turn on that it was. Instead of easing up, I flexed my hips, pushing deeply into his mouth and down his throat.

His hand stroked my length, as he sucked and slurped noisily, every few seconds choking on my cock, and my hips started a wild bucking that I couldn't stop if either of our lives depended on it.

Seth's blue eyes caught mine, black smeared under his eyes from his tears, his cheeks flushed rosy. He was a beautiful mess, and my hand tangled in his hair, holding his head still. I thrust hard once, twice, my balls heavy and aching.

Never looking away, Seth stroked me faster with his hand, his mouth sucked harder, and I was gone.

My cum exploded in his mouth as I let out a rumble growl from deep in my chest, and Seth hummed in pleasure around my dick. The sensation set off another short spurt that left my limbs trembling.

Seth popped off my softening cock, swallowed the last of my cum, then swiped at a line that had dribbled down his chin with his thumb. He sucked his digit into his mouth, as I helped him stand, still trying to catch my breath.

Tucking myself back into my pants, he hit the button and the elevator restarted its climb upwards.

"Did we just have sex in an elevator?"



Seth gave me a saucy, unrepentant grin. “We did.”

The doors opened to our floor, and Seth grabbed my hand, pulling me with him as he practically ran to our suite .

My hands fumbled the keycard, until he took it from me, forcibly pushed me inside and slammed the door behind us with a loud bang.

“On the bed,” he ordered, and my cock twitched as his bossy tone.

“Bossy brat,” I muttered, though my hands were tossing my clothes off as fast as I could.

Seth winked, “You know it.”

Hooking my arm behind his neck, I devoured his mouth, tasting myself on his tongue. “My bossy brat.”

“Yes,” he breathed against my mouth, his warm hands roaming across my bare chest.

He gave me a small shove that didn’t even move me a quarter of an inch, and I raised my brows at him. He made a shooing motion at me and then the bed. “Get naked and on the bed.”

Doing as he asked—demanded—I made myself comfortable on the luxurious bed, settling my back against the headboard. I had been dreaming of this night for what felt like forever, claiming Seth as mine.

My body thrummed with anticipation of my teeth sinking into his mating gland, marking him as mine, for the world to see. I’d been waiting for him to be ready, and the wait had been worth it.

I watched with hungry eyes as Seth slowly did a sexy striptease, divesting himself of his silky pink top that shimmered whenever he moved.

He unzipped first one thigh high black boot, then the other, pulling each one off in a move any professional erotic dancer would be proud of. The tight leather mini-skirt followed, as well as the thin straps of material of the thong he wore.

He stretched his arms above his head, in a move reminiscent of our first night together, when he had danced in my hotel room.

Or the day at the pool just above us now, when he had been heavily pregnant, looking lush and sensual, and more beautiful than there were words to describe.

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Even though I had just unloaded my balls into his mouth not twenty minutes earlier, watching him now had my cock half hard. Heavy lidded, I gave it a lazy stroke, then issued an order of my own. One I had fantasized about for a year.

“Put the boots back on,” I growled. “Just the boots.”

Seth gave me a slow smile, before reaching for the footwear. “Kinky.”

“I’ve wanted to fuck you in just those boots since last year,” I admitted, wondering why I found the sight of him ever so slowly pulling up the zipper of one of the boots so fucking erotic.

Had I developed some kind of foot fetish or was it just with my mate?

Seth stroked his cock, and my breathing sped up as I watched his hand slide over his own flesh. Slowly he thumbed his slit, swiping at the pearly drop of precum that was on his tip, then he picked up speed on the downward slide.

Moisture flooded my suddenly dry mouth, and I couldn’t do anything but watch as he pleased himself.

He was stunning, standing at the foot of the bed, naked except for black, leather thigh high boots.

His body had bounced back rather quickly from the birth, though his tummy had the slightest little roundness to it, and his hips were more rounded than they had been.

Still stroking himself, Seth reached behind him with his other hands, and I could only imagine his fingers sliding into his slick hole. His back arched, and he let out the dirtiest moan as he stretched himself for my cock.

“Enough!” I finally growled, when I couldn’t take it any longer. My cock was rock hard, and I grasped the base hard to keep myself from coming just from watching Seth pleasure himself.

His eyes gleamed wickedly, as the hand on his cock stopped and he slowly withdrew his fingers from his ass.

They glistened with his slick, and I nearly shot my load then and there when he sucked one finger into his mouth. Slowly, he licked his fingers clean of his slick, then crawled up the bed.

He straddled my thighs, hovering over my dick so it barely teased his hole. The leather of his boots slid against the hair of my legs with a sweet friction .

“Put me inside you,” I growled, planting my feet firmly on the mattress and arching my hips upward.

Seth reached behind himself and grasped my cock, his hand just above my own. Guiding the head to his entrance, he slowly sank down, hissing at the burn as my cockhead stretched him wide.

His fingers dug into my shoulders, and my hands tightened on his hips, guiding him, as inch by sweet inch I slid deeper inside him.

Until his ass was resting against my thighs, and I was buried as far in him as I could get.

The tendons of my neck were tight, my jaw clenched, as I waited for him to adjust

and move. He nodded, and we moved together, our movements matched perfectly.

“Not gonna last,” I warned through gritted teeth, as Seth bounced on my dick, his speed picking up, his movements jerky and less coordinated.

“Give it to me!” he howled, as we moved feverishly together. Our flesh slapped together, sweat beaded our skin, muscles strained.

Seth grabbed a handful of my hair, and I arched my neck, my back bowing off the bed. Clutching him to me, I felt my fangs elongate, and I sank my teeth into his mating gland.

Seth’s sharp teeth broke my skin, the pain a sweet pleasure, as my balls erupted and I came with a muffled scream. Hot splashes of cum rained down my chest and stomach, as Seth groaned against my skin, sealing our bond.

Several minutes later, we lay entwined in the tangled sheets. Seth had peeled his boots off and draped himself over my side. My fingers trailed lazy circles over his skin, his warm breath blowing over the sensitive skin of my neck.

Multi-colored lights suddenly bathed the bed, and sharp pops of sound filled the night air.

Seth rolled over to stare at the fireworks marking the beginning of a new year.

“It’s midnight,” he murmured, turning back to me.

His eyes widened in confusion, then his mouth formed a wide O, as he stared at the red velvet ring box I was holding out to him.

“Where...how...?” he stammered, the silver band changing colors with the myriad of exploding lights decorating the sky.

“I had it under my pillow,” I wiped my sweaty palm on the sheet, not sure why I was nervous. “Will you marry me?”

He blinked at me, like he hadn’t understood the question, so I just plowed ahead.

“I had an entire speech planned out, but I honestly can’t remember one single word of it. I love you, Seth. I think I have from the moment you walked into my office like you owned it. I want you to be mine forever. I—”

“Yes,” he whispered, his face breaking into a beaming smile. That one word made whatever else I was planning to say just disappear. “Yes, Alex, yes!”

“Yes?”

“Fucking yes, now give me the damn ring!”

He made grabby hands at me, and I laughed, though my fingers trembled as I slid the ring onto his finger.

He held his hand to get a good look at the ring on his finger, moving his hand this way and that. Satisfied, he tilted his face up, and I obliged his unspoken demand, my lips covering his in a sensual, heated kiss.

My heart swelled knowing that I was going to be able to kiss this man for the rest of my life.

“Mocoso Bonito ,” I whispered against his lips, smiling happily.

With a flirtatious wink, he whispered, “Your pretty brat. Only yours. Always.”

“Sí , always.”

The End